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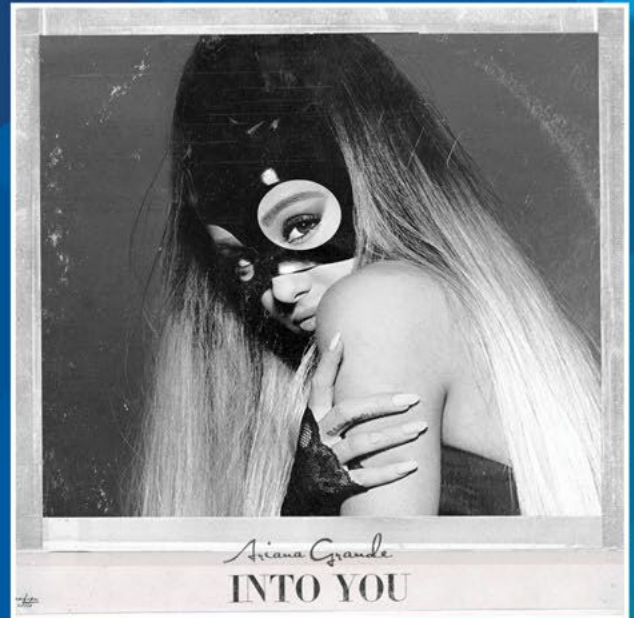


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"ALL THE NEWS THAT FITS"



THE SLOW RISE OF INDIAN HIP-HOP

Once at the margins of the music scene, hip-hop is now going mainstream, driven largely by the angst of singers in languages other than English

BY AKHIL SOOD

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ROLLING STONE | AUGUST 2016

Garrett Børns
aka Børns



ON THE COVER: (Clockwise from extreme left) Naezy, Divine, Bobkat, Ace and Stony Pysko. Photographed by Vikas Vasudev. All members are wearing clothes by Aeropostale

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rollingstoneindia.com

Main Stage, Tomorrowland, Belgium



ONLINE EXCLUSIVES

TOMORROWLAND, BELGIUM, 2016

Read exclusive stories and updates about what went down at the 12th edition of Tomorrowland, Belgium, which took place last month. The three-day electronic music festival hosted 16 stages in total and saw close to two lakh attendees from around the world. The headliners this year included EDM biggies Tiësto, Deadmau5, Axwell & Ingrosso Armin van Buuren, Dada Life and many more.

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Love Letters e3 Advice



Electronica Outburst

I have been following Sapta for a few years now, and apart from hearing most of their material (at least everything available on SoundCloud), I've also caught them live in Pune a few times. But their seventh album, in my opinion, takes things to a completely different level! Even their 'Sapta' album launch was more intense than any of the previous gigs I can recall. I sure hope this isn't their last record.

-Reshma George, Pune

King of the World

Muhammad Ali's tenacity and willpower in the face of crippling

racism and general adversity is nothing less than awe-inspiring. Although his autobiography is among my top reads, the July feature provided some great third-party insight into his impact on white America of the Sixties. Rest in power, mighty Muhammad!

Aditya Bajaj, Hyderabad

Blitzkrieg Bop!

The Ramones are one of my favourite bands of all time, and their music has the power to transport you right back to the grimy Seventies. It was especially interesting to read about the each of the band members' rough upbringings and the band's internal conflicts and breakdowns. But what struck me most is how the band never truly got the credit they deserved and always and left-of-centre status until recent years.

Pooja Sharma, Mumbai

Lone Ranger Angello

In some ways, it comes as a pleasant surprise that musicians like Steve Angello — who are in the very midst of the supposedly

'unoriginal' electronica industry — so strongly disagree with the copy-paste idea of modern music. But on the other hand, his live performance and musicality last month convinced me entirely that the former Swedish House Mafia member is truly one of the most creatively independent artists out there today.

Karan Roy, Delhi



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Hip-Hop's Protest Era

ON JULY 7TH, JAY Z DID SOMETHING out of character: He released a protest song. The rapper had reportedly wired tens of thousands of dollars to bail protesters out of jail in Baltimore in 2015, and Tidal donated \$1.5 million to Black Lives Matter-related causes earlier this year. But it was only after the shootings of Alton Sterling and Philando Castile by police officers in Louisiana and Minnesota – as well as the shooting deaths of five Dallas police officers at a protest days

As the Black Lives Matter movement reaches a boiling point, artists face a difficult question: How should they respond?

BY DAVID PEISNER

later – that he finally spoke out. “Just a boy from the hood that/Got my hands in the air in despair/Don’t shoot,” he rhymed on “Spiritual.” He elaborated in a statement: “I’m saddened and disappointed in *this* America. We should be further along.”

He was not alone. In the days after the videos of the shootings went viral, Beyoncé released a letter that read, in part, “The war on people of color and all minorities needs to be over.” Snoop Dogg and the Game led a march in L.A., and T.I. protested in Atlanta.

A History of Pop and Politics

From Bill Clinton's sax to Aretha's hat, a new Rock and Roll Hall of Fame exhibit celebrates music's place in the political revolution

AS 50,000 CONSERVATIVES descended on Cleveland for the Republican National Convention, the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame was more crowded than usual. Bill O'Reilly, Caitlyn Jenner and Scott Baio all received private tours, taking in the massive new exhibit "Louder Than Words: Rock, Power and Politics." Spread over two floors, it traces how rock has influenced attitudes about politics, patriotism and race, with items including Jimi Hendrix's Woodstock guitar and the sax Bill Clinton played on *Arsenio Hall* in 1992. After performing outside the RNC with his band Prophets of Rage, Tom Morello woke up early to see the exhibit. He singles out a poster for a segregated Little Richard gig and a listening station for Rod Stewart's 1976 song "The Killing of Georgie" – about a gay friend murdered by a homophobic gang



– as the most powerful items. "Each article screams, 'Which side are you on?'" says Morello. "[It] brought into sharp focus how right-wingers have been on the wrong side of history at important junctures." Conservatives didn't seem to mind that most artifacts came from left-leaning acts. "Let's face it," says Rock Hall president Greg Harris, "this isn't a balanced story. Rock & rollers believe in change."

ANDY GREENE

COMBAT ROCK (1) The hat Aretha Franklin wore to Obama's inauguration. **(2)** A letter Alan Freed sent to ABC amid government payola allegations. **(3)** Clinton's sax. **(4)** Elvis' Army jacket. **(5)** Joe Strummer's main Telecaster. "I begged the curator to let me borrow it," says Morello.

At least a dozen other artists, from Miguel to Swizz Beatz, released songs in the wake of the shootings.

"You're seeing a new generation of activists being sparked," says Talib Kweli. Beginning with the shooting of Trayvon Martin in 2012, the Black Lives Matter movement has spurred a wave of politically charged hip-hop and R&B, from artists like J. Cole, Kendrick Lamar and Beyoncé. But the recent shootings have provoked a massive response and moved even previously apolitical artists to speak out. "We saw Alton Sterling get murdered," says longtime activist Kweli. "Philando Castile, you watch him die. We've never seen images like that back-to-back." *Love & Hip Hop* star Joe Budden, who referenced Sterling and Castile in a four-minute freestyle over Beyoncé's "Freedom," said he decided to take action "when I heard that little girl" – the daughter of Castile's fiancée – "having to console her mom after he had been murdered." Kweli contributed a verse to the song "I Can't Breathe" – inspired by the dying words of Eric Garner, choked to death by police in 2014 – and appeared in a video that featured celebrities like Lenny Kravitz and Alicia Keys talking about police violence. "We are in our 'We Are the World' moment," he says.



Kweli warns rappers wading into politics that they need to educate themselves. "If you're not speaking the same language or don't know where the movement is going," says Kweli, "you might end up sounding foolish." Snoop and the Game were criticized by members of Black Lives Matter after the rappers appeared with the mayor and police chief in Los Angeles. ("The celebrities erased the work that we're doing," said activist Jasmine Abdullah. "The mayor is using [them] to divide and conquer our community.") G-Unit rapper Young Buck released two tracks that seemed to advocate meeting vi-

olence with violence, drawing fire from conservatives. One of them, "Riot," implores listeners to "get your motherfucking guns" and "start a motherfucking riot." "I'm not encouraging individuals to take an innocent cop's life," Buck says, "but I'm for those that believe in protecting their own lives in any way necessary."

DeRay Mckesson, one of the most prominent voices in the fight against police brutality, points to Beyoncé as an example of how an artist can make a difference. "Her celebrity works in the function of social justice and does not overshadow the work," he says. "When Beyoncé lists the names of the victims at her concerts, or puts a link to lawmakers on her website, she invites more people into the conversation." Adds Kanye West protégé Vic Mensa, who in June released "16 Shots," about the killing of Laquan McDonald by Chicago police, "What we can do as artists is inspire people to give a fuck."

Chuck D of Public Enemy says the stakes have never been higher. "It's like Grandmaster Flash's 'The Message,'" he says. "Don't push me, 'cause I'm close to the edge/I'm trying not to lose my head." Melle Mel wrote that shit more than 30 years ago. How can you think that doesn't apply to right now? So many people are close to the edge, and the tipping point is not far away."

TOP: (FROM LEFT) ROCK AND ROLL HALL OF FAME; CARL HARP/ROCK AND ROLL HALL OF FAME; 4 (LEFT) PEBBY WONG/SHUTTERSTOCK.COM (JAY Z); RICARDO WAYNARD / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO (BLACK LIVES MATTER)

Rattle and Rock: Guitar Synergy

Veteran jazz pianist/keyboardist Louiz Banks on his latest “rock-oriented” band Guitar Synergy



Rolan
KEY ROLE
Louiz Banks
at a concert

“LIFE IS BUSY, BUT IT’S INTERESTING!” exclaims Louiz Banks. The veteran jazz pianist/keyboardist has a platterful of projects keeping him occupied these days — 10 studio albums with various artists, two musicals due later this year and multiple collaborations with singers (Vasundhara Vidalur, Isheeta Chakravarty, Rimi Nique and Tara Sutaria) and saxophonists (American jazz musician Carl Clements) — not to mention his latest, liveliest jazz rock band Guitar Synergy.

The two-month-old project, driven equally by his son and ace drummer Gino, brings together some of the country’s best instrumentalists (most of them less than half his age) to create music that combines the intensity of rock with the free form of jazz. Says Banks, “I have a very young band with me — they’re giving me a lot of ideas and their energy is great. It’s an adrenaline rush!”

The five-member band came together in May with Banks on keys, Gino behind the drum kit, 20-year-old bass prodigy Mohini Dey and Mumbai-based guitarists Rhythm Shaw and Kush Upadhyay (20 and 19 respectively). Banks recalls, “Gino brought Kush to the studio to meet me and I was very impressed with him. He had a great sense of melody, a great feel for rock music and was quite inventive with his solos.” A few weeks later, [formerly Kolkata-based

guitarist] Shaw shifted to Mumbai and auditioned for Banks. “I was amazed at what he could do on the guitar,” he says. “That sparked the idea for Guitar Synergy. I thought, ‘Why don’t I get both these guitarists together and develop material?’”

Louiz soon sealed the lineup with Gino — his “first choice in drums” — and Dey — who was “perfect for this set up, since she’s got this rock/funk oriented playing”. The material is now, as the keyboardist describes it, “more rock-oriented, because it’s guitar-driven. It’s away from the hardcore jazz thing that I do. You’ll find that my jazz roots will come out, but it’s more rock-oriented,” he explains.

Guitar Synergy are already armed with a gig [and potential album] full of material — the band debuted last month at Mumbai performance venue Antisocial with tunes like the funky “Howrah Bridge” (“I come from Kolkata so I have to use something from there!” Banks jokes), a bluesy piece dubbed “Jimi Comes to India” (“Perfect for guitar”, he feels), and other rock-driven tracks like “Run Free” and “Timeless”. The jazz rock collective is now looking to play more live shows — possibly with guest musicians — and eventually hit the studio to lay down their tracks for a full-length debut. Says Banks, “It’s been only two months, but I think this band is going to go a long way.”

NABEELA SHAIKH

ON RECORD

UP AND AT 'EM

Kolkata indietronica artist Oh, Rocket! is channeling confusion and Eighties pop on his upcoming material, which includes an EP and an album

If we had one takeaway from our conversation with Kolkata-based Aniket Dutta, it would be — “it’s quite confusing.” Dutta, who started his indietronica project Oh, Rocket! in late 2013 with guitarist-producer Shubharun Sengupta, says his upcoming third EP — called *Police Science* — is influenced by too many things.

Dutta has just moved house to the metropolitan area of Jodhpur Park in south Kolkata and started living with his girlfriend, a film producer. He says they’re working on two films together, one of which he’s turned story writer for, in addition to working out a score similar to Oh, Rocket!’s synth-friendly vibe. He’s joined a film production house, too. Says Dutta, “That [film] has more impact than my own musical influences. But still, I’m very confused with what I want to do and what I’m wanting.”

The four-track *Police Science* is pretty much centered around dilemma. Dutta says the EP is about “not making sense” and the songs are just about “nonsensical things,” in terms of lyrical themes. We agree, there’s probably no better way to describe existing live unreleased staples such as “Common Carrot,” which finds its way on the Eighties pop-influenced, cinematic record. Dutta, of course, is crooning his way through in his distinct R&B-esque range, making sure we probably don’t understand a word of what he’s on about, on first listen.

Holed up in his new home studio setup, Dutta has played synth, guitars and will lay down vocals to have *Police Science* ready by October. There’s also the long-overdue full-length record *Bloomspoon*, now due early next year. The album was originally intended for completion in 2014, but Oh, Rocket! instead moved ahead with two chill, electronica EPs — *The Clouds Woke No Clocks* and 2015’s *Clever Clever*. He adds about the release plan this time around, “We’ll have big shows. I’ll work with a full band, but I haven’t thought of who’ll be in the band yet.” He talks with uncertainty about gigs, but says it might just be what he needs. “I’m planning a tour, but I do have to play gigs. It occupies most of my daily habit, when I have to practice. That helps, actually.”

ANURAG TAGAT



Aniket Dutta
aka Oh Rocket!

IMAGES COURTESY OF THE ARTIST

Bengaluru Gets a New Music Venue

How singer-songwriter Suraj Mani spent a year turning his office conference room into a collaborative arts space

TWO YEARS AGO, WHEN Suraj Mani was office-hunting in Bengaluru for his air-conditioning company [Suraj Mani Engineers], he bought two floors in a building located in the city's Kalyan Nagar. He then chanced upon its topmost fifth floor. "I looked at that floor and said, 'This is also mine,'" says Mani, best known as a singer-songwriter with his rock band The Tattva Trip and previously as the frontman of prog rockers Motherjane.

It wasn't until last year that Mani laid out his plans to convert what was initially a conference room into a performance space called OO Heaven [short for "On Occasions, Heaven"]. After a test run with the Tattva Trip in December last year and another with Kerala fusion band called Soul E to iron out sound issues, the venue opened in June with Kochi musician Govind Menon [from fusion rock band Thaikkudam Bridge] launching his solo project. However, Mani adds with a laugh, "It's still a conference room when it's not used for a gig. We have presentations with the best audio acous-



GIG PAD The performance space OO Heaven; Suraj Mani (left) of the band The Tattva Trip



tics now. It's the hippest conference room in the country."

In addition to revamping the room to add carpeting, acoustics, ceilings and a stage, OO Heaven also has a break area

outside the performance space. Mani says he wanted to create infrastructure that was different from the existing pub venues in Bengaluru. "It's a very good feeling for the artists when they perform to an attentive audience. We get a performer's high from that and we deserve that high once in a while," says Mani.

Menon, who performed mostly-instrumental solo material as well as covers to a seated audience of 75 people, says, "It's not about the size of the venue, it's about the culture. When people are there purely for music, it's very validating. Indie artists need places like these, because then we can start off here before we play anywhere else."

Mani's artist management firm Aum-I Artistes is currently hosting their monthly gig series The Muse Room at the venue, as part of which The Tattva Trip and singer-songwriter Mahesh Raghunandan played there last month. This month (August 13th), alt/folk rock band Thakara and folk/psychedelic band SMAKMahadeV will perform. **ANURAG TAGAT**

Sufi Meets Rap

Kashmiri rapper MC Kash and Pune-based sufi rock band Alif collaborate on a track that highlights Kashmir's beauty and resilience

Following the successful run of Hip Hop Homeland, a project that chronicled the rise of desi hip-hop through documentaries and culminated with a gig in Mumbai in April, pop culture portal 101India has now shifted focus to sufi music. Their new initiative's first offering is a sufi-rap song, titled "Like A Sufi", featuring Kashmir-based rapper Roushan Illahi aka MC Kash and Pune sufi-rock band Alif.

Since Illahi and Alif frontman Mohammad Muneem Nazir are both from Kashmir, they decided to write the song in Kashmiri (or Koshur, a dying language spoken primarily in the valley of Kashmir and Chenab) with portions in English. "You have to write in the

language that you think in," says Nazir, adding "It's about communicating the goodness, the kindness, and it automatically reaches people."

The video and the song steer clear of referencing the political unrest in Kashmir in a conscious bid to look beyond it. While the video features breathtaking footage of Kashmir's natural beauty, the lyrics urge the listener to take cue from the lives of the revered sufis. Both Illahi and Nazir thought the marriage between sufi, a genre that employs metaphorical lyricism, and rap – with its roots in blunt, irreverent hip-hop – was a great idea. They finished composing and writing the song in all of one day!

The duo have walked the same fence with the second song of the series, "Jhelumus," which is about the resilience of Kashmiri women. "I thought it was a responsibility for

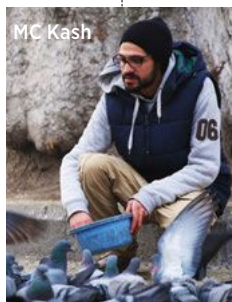
me as a Kashmiri to do it [share stories] with my non-Kashmiri friends," says Nazir.

The folks behind the project feel that such collaborations are only reflective of India's multiculturalism. Says Cyrus Oshidar, MD and COO, 101India, "It makes it more relevant to younger audiences. It also celebrates the immense diversity of a country where so many different influences and cultures live together."

Earlier this year, Mumbai-based Kashmiri singer Vibha Saraf paid tribute to her homeland with an acoustic-leaning version of the regional bhajan "Harmokh Bartal," aimed at focusing on Kashmir's folk culture rather than its conflict.

Says Nazir, "I think more and more musicians should go back to their roots... So that someone listening to the music can understand [the artist] a little more."

RIDDHI CHAKRABORTY



David Gilmour, Live at Pompeii, Italy

Everything you need to know about the Pink Floyd singer-guitarist's return to the oldest amphitheater in the world
By Deepak Rao

IDON'T REALLY CONSIDER MYSELF HOLY or religious, but over the last couple of days I have truly understood what it means to be a pilgrim.

When I found out that David Gilmour was playing two shows at Pompeii and was lucky enough to score tickets for both nights, I was extremely nervous. With a 24-hour journey from Bengaluru the day before the first show, there were so many things that could have gone wrong. But thankfully, they didn't.

Music legends Pink Floyd filmed *Pink Floyd: Live at Pompeii* in October 1971. The documentary released the next year and quickly became a cult classic. You don't see bands nowadays recording in an empty amphitheatre just because they want to; commercial importance played second fiddle back then.

It is a well-known fact that Pompeii was enshrined in history due to an eruption in 79 AD by Mt. Vesuvius (my mother had read about it in Kannada in her textbooks) but arriving at such a historic site for the first time and understanding the story behind it was fascinating.

I learned that it was not lava that killed the people of Pompeii but rather an eruption of ash that, by an act of fate, sealed the city in time. Human bodies that decomposed left cavities in the ash that were later rather cleverly pumped full of plaster to get a cast that detailed their final moments with amazing detail. About 70 percent of Pompeii has been excavated and it is fascinating to learn how archaeologists and historians have pieced together the cautionary tale that has been told for 2,000 years.

But now on to the shows. And Gilmour.

Most people naturally associate him with the solo of "Comfortably Numb." And don't get me wrong, I absolutely love that song,



but what I find equally interesting is how lucky we are to witness the evolution of the maestro since that solo in 1979. Which leads us to this tour, following the release of his fourth and latest studio album *Rattle That Lock* at age 70.

OPENING NIGHT: July 7th

In the town of Pompeii, two things were key to spot who was going to the show – a goofy grin and a blue wristband with the Gilmour logo. Everywhere you went you could hear his music, with cafés happily inviting people to hang out after the show – they would be waiting for us! With all that travelling, I was pretty tired but joined the queue around

6:30pm – the queue was taking surprisingly long for just 2,000 people but I guess it had been a while (2 millennia) since they had to go through these logistics. I took a risk with my Jambox and played some songs in the queue which helped pass the time and helped make me some new friends as the unofficial queue DJ.

With the customary stop at the merchandise store and a trip under the walls of the amphitheatre, we were finally inside. Going through those historic walls was probably the closest I'll ever be to a gladiator.

At exactly 9pm – and 10 years to the day since the legendary [Pink Floyd founder]



Syd Barrett passed, Gilmour took the stage and started with “5 A.M.” [off *Rattle That Lock*]. The show really kicked off when the lighting and the distinctive circle screen (think “Pulse”) kicked in. With the legend Marc Brickman(!) in charge of lighting, the amphitheatre was beautiful. I spent as much time looking at the surroundings as I did the stage. Over the next three hours, a spectacular set was performed (widely reported, so I will skip the specifics).

There are no prizes for guessing that “Comfortably Numb” was the final encore, and I went back to my hotel, extremely tired, but in awe of what I had just witnessed.

Surely that couldn’t be topped.

SECOND AND FINAL NIGHT: July 8th

Refreshed, I joined the queue at 3:30pm which earned me the chance to see David up front after a near 6-hour wait (and with a yellow wristband this time). It was worth the effort as I think I witnessed his best-ever performance (the show will be released on film; do buy it as the proceeds help the city of Pompeii).

Right from “5 A.M.,” the band and David seemed much more relaxed, having got the anticipation of the previous night out of the way. Almost every guitar solo/song was an extended version which made the show very different from the previous night although the setlist was identical.

It was no secret that the elephant in the room was the anticipated performance of “Echoes” which Gilmour was forced to respond to (bluntly). “I’d love to play it, but it is a conversation between two people. And Rick’s dead. This is about the present.” As opposed to disappointment, we cheered; the previous night had seen an ode to his former bandmate Richard Wright with “A Great Gig In The Sky” followed by “A Boat Lies Waiting”.

The show ended with an incredible rendition of “Comfortably Numb”. For the final 10 minutes, Gilmour, who was made an honorary citizen of the city of Pompeii the day before the first show, reminded us that classics are classics for good reason.

The last time I saw Gilmour was in the Royal Albert Hall in London by sheer luck. I was a broke student handing out goodie bags at the venue for the previous graduating class, when I realised he was playing and somehow managed to catch the show in the same box as actor Ewan McGregor, while [cult pop icon] David Bowie performed vocals on “Comfortably Numb”. I thought that was the luckiest I would ever get.

And almost exactly a decade later, here I am in Pompeii.

Welcome home David, and thank you.

COMFORTABLY NUMB

(Clockwise from extreme left) Gilmour overwhelmed with the response from the audience; a fan outside the amphitheatre; restaurants displayed boards welcoming guests after the show; the concert ticket and the ubiquitous blue wristband.





NEW ARTIST

Desiigner's Master Plan

In New York City in May

GODDAMN, IT'S HOT OUT HERE!" Desiigner cries out. "It's like Jesus times – Bible heat! I'm about to pass the fuck out."

It's noon in Las Vegas, and the 19-year-old MC is on his way to the airport. He's from Brooklyn, so the desert climate is taking some getting used to. Desiigner's in Vegas because he performed at the club IOAK last night, riding the success of his breakthrough single, "Panda." The song, which Kanye West sampled extensively on *The Life of Pablo*, recently rose to Number One on the Hot 100, powered by a bullying beat and Desiigner's slurred sing-song. The beat, it turns out, was made by a European kid named Menace, who Desiigner never met – he bought it from him on-

How a teenage Brooklyn rapper turned a \$200 beat into a deal with Kanye – and a smash hit

BY JONAH WEINER

line for \$200, in what has to be one of pop's all-time greatest returns on an investment.

"Panda" is both hard and playful – its central conceit is that a white BMW X6 resembles a panda, which is an adorable way to celebrate conspicuous consumption. (The song's sonic and thematic resemblances to the music of Future have been identified by admirers and detractors alike. Desiigner routinely brushes off the com-

parisons: "God gave him a blessing, but he gave me a blessing too," he's said.) The six-foot-five Desiigner says he relates to music intuitively. "I got a whole lot of slugs in the chamber. Music is everything. I'm like a big-ass music note with arms and legs!"

He was born Sidney Selby III and grew up in Bedford-Stuyvesant. "My dad worked on ambulances for a while; my mother had a lot of different jobs with the city," he recalls. He's loved music as long as he can remember. "I played the sax at school. I was in marching band. My moms and pops listened to Funkadelic, Michael, Aerosmith – I fucked with rock & roll. My grandfather is a blues musician" – Sidney Selby, who played with the Isley Brothers and the Drifters, among others – "so my mind was everywhere. You'd be surprised what you'd catch on my playlist."

For Desiigner, music wasn't just a passion but a means of escape. "I tried selling drugs – it didn't work," he says. When he was 14, in circumstances that he declines to

detail, a bullet hit him in the hip – an experience that put him briefly in the hospital, and which convinced him to pursue music for a living: "My advice now is stay positive and get your money."

That attitude paid off in January, when he was interrupted by a phone call while working on new music. It was Kanye, who had caught wind of "Panda" as it bubbled online, asking Desiigner to meet him in L.A. Desiigner soon signed with G.O.O.D. Music, Kanye's imprint at Def Jam. His rapping tends to privilege sound over sense – he's hypermelodic, rhythmically inventive and frequently unintelligible. "I play with my voice, make it sound crazy," he says.

In recent weeks, Desiigner has called a studio in North Hollywood home. His camp tells me he'll be releasing a mixtape imminently, but when I ask him what he's got coming, he's whimsical: "I'm working on a whole lot of bangers. I'm making movies, you feel me? The album will come out maybe the top of next year – but I'm a true artist. I might drop an album tomorrow!"

When I ask how he celebrated "Panda" going to Number One, he laughs. As some lyrics on "Panda" indicate, he's partial to mellow drugs. "I just smoke weed – only the herbals, maybe a little lean here and there," he says, and any time he spends in nightclubs is as a performer, quickly shown the door the moment he's done onstage. "I'm 19!" he reminds me, getting ready to board his plane. "I need to turn 21 so I can actually stay in these clubs!"

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The Ska Vengers: XX Rated

How India's leading ska/reggae band interpreted jail encounters and Modi-era malaise on their biting sophomore record

By Nabeela Shaikh



BACK WITH A VENGEANCE
(From left) Stefan Kaye, Taru Dalmia, Samara Chopra, Nikhil Vasudevan, Tony Guinard and Chaitanya Bhalla

“I THINK I SPEND A LOT OF TIME hanging around with the dregs of society,” says Stefan Kaye. “Some people may think that these individuals have noble professions, but they’re the worst kind of morally bankrupt, parasitic fuckwits.” The British-born keyboardist/percussionist for The Ska Vengers holds a special caustic contempt for most servants of the law ever since he ran into visa violation trouble four and a half years ago. It’s

the same legal tangle that’s led the 38-year-old to despise “most lawyers, every single police officer, magistrates, civil servants.” It’s also the same legal tangle that landed him in Tihar’s jail No. 4 for three weeks in 2011. More recently, it tossed Kaye back in court just hours before the Delhi ska/reggae band launched their second album *XX* (pronounced “double cross”) last month. But the gig went off smoothly; the six-member band — also comprising vocalists Taru Dalmia

aka Delhi Sultanate and Samara Chopra aka Begum X, guitarist Chaitanya ‘Chazz’ Bhalla, drummer Nikhil Vasudevan and bassist Tony Guinard — weren’t the least bit phased from kicking up a rumpus.

XX comes four years after The Ska Vengers’ romping self-titled debut, and roughly eight years after Kaye first put together the band with former guitarist Raghav Dang (later replaced by Chazz). While a twist of Facebook-fate brought

ZACHARIE RABEHI

Kaye and Dang together in 2008, the former approached Dalmia at one of the rapper's monthly Bass Foundation nights that same year. Drummer Vasudevan and Chopra joined in, in 2009. The six-member band (along with saxophonists Rie Ona and Shirish Malhotra) spent a large part of 2010 jamming, smoothening out their sound and working on original material alongside — all of which started landing them gigs.

In 2011, there was the Free Binayak Sen benefit program where they performed tracks like “Vampire” and “Why Don't You Do Right”, which would later make their way to 2012's *The Ska Vengers*. There was renowned author Arundhati Roy's book launch gig for *Broken Republic* the same year, for which the band also got Roy to the studio to develop a track around a monolog of hers entitled “The President Took the Salute”. The Ska Vengers even returned to Tihar Jail the next year to perform at the Tihar Ska Ska Ska gig, where the band shared the stage with The Flying Souls, a band comprising Tihar's inmates, and breakdance/beatbox collective Slumdogs from Delhi.

It was also around the same time that Dalmia launched his second documentary with socio-political trust and audio-visual project Word Sound Power — *Blood Earth* was a protest song remix project focused on conflict zones in Odisha — that later made it to German film festival Berlinale. By the time they launched their socio-politically fueled debut four years ago, Ska Vengers were regulars on the club circuit — perhaps one of the few to take the stage in cabaret-style ties and suits, at that. So it figures when Kaye says, “There was no pressure on us to put anything out. We could afford to spend a little more time [with XX]. We already made a statement with the first album, the band is a little better known, we're getting paid more for gigs.”

The band was back in the studio by mid-2013, prepping instrumentals like “Stef Bitten” and “shorter, more pop songs and covers”, as Kaye describes. Much of the earlier material never made it to record number two, however, tentatively foiling the band's plans to release XX in a vinyl format. Says Kaye, “It was going to be a 13-song album, but we took off four songs. We originally wanted to put out a vinyl version and sequence it as side one and side two. The members of the band might be horrified, but it reminds me of some King Crimson LP!” he exclaims.

With XX coming together in the background, The Ska Vengers—and most of the individual members—kept busy with various projects through 2014, including their animated video “Modi, A Message to You” aimed at (then-Prime Ministerial candidate) Narendra Modi; and their Doordarshan-in-

spired biter “Badda” (that riffs off Grieg's 1867 “Anitra's Dance” and the 1980 Ravi Shankar/Philip Glass collaboration “Ragas in Minor Scale”). Kaye, Vasudevan and Guinard scored gigs with their side project The Jass B'stards, Dalmia continued to work with Andhra poet activist Gaddar as part of Word Sound Power, taking time out toward the end of the year to fly to Afghanistan with Chopra for a “concert for peace” in Kabul. Raghav ‘Diggy’ Dang left the band to focus on Reggae Rajahs and was replaced by Chaitanya Bhalla. “I was able juggle both (bands) for about five-six years,” Dang explains, “but there came a point where I

Not acceptable to conservatives, perhaps: the title track pays respect to “all the fallen soldiers” (“Bhagat Singh Shaheed, rest in peace/ Chandra Shekhar Azad and Kishenji”) and takes aim at corruption (“Politicians tell lies to get elected/ When you see say them have an ulterior motive/ So you know we don't trust parliament”), while “011” sees a visceral Dalmia call out state surveillance and media manipulation (“Newspaper is not my intelligence/Ambani controls the news intelligence”). The criminally groovy “Jail Mein” takes an offender's lust for “lockdown”-free life straight from the cell to the stage: (“*Rehena pade-ga Tihar Jail mein*”). But there's a few [relatively!] lighter moments on the record as well: the tongue-in-cheek “Shut Your Mouth” sees Chopra grab a moment of sass, while “Afro Fantasy” is a heady trip through Latin, punk, jazz — and vacuum cleaner — stemming from Kaye's interest in experimental, John Cage-esque “musique concrète.” That probably also explains producer Paul Schnitter clanging pots and pans on the instrumentally-driven Latin/Afro-Cuban party-starter “El Cumbanchero/Red Fort Rock”.

The band are also plotting the video for their next single “Afro Fantasy,” due later this year. While it's probably the least likely, “radio-friendly” choice out of the nine tracks, the video—featuring Russian ballet dancer Yaroslava Yaroslawa dancing “completely naked except for a coat of white paint and a thong”—is probably still going to stick. “It's the least obvious song for a single and I actually really like that idea,” explains Kaye. “The band agreed that it's nice to not do what's expected...we thought, ‘Hey, let's put out a ten-and-a-half minute Latin-jazz-psychedelic odyssey with a ballet dancer!’ That's the most un-Ska Vengers thing you can imagine, what a great idea!”

The band is currently in the UK for a 14-stop tour that includes festivals and a few one-off gigs. “I wish I knew what to expect!” jokes Bhalla, who will be touring internationally for the first time. “We're just going to take it head on.” On the agenda are club shows and festivals including Hampshire's Boomtown Fair — “like Glastonbury but for slightly more mature people,” as Kaye describes — and Riverside Live in Durham where the band will play the same stage as Jamaican producer and reggae powerhouse Lee ‘Scratch’ Perry. The tour, which had been in the works for five months now, is the band's attempt to break out of the scene and spread the ska beyond Indian audiences. Says Kaye, “The music is not complicated. You just get up and dance about and have a nice time, maybe with a dash of politics.”

RS



VOCAL SUPPORT

The cover of The Ska Vengers' second album, titled 'XX'

was spreading myself too thin and had to give undivided attention to one.” The band even roped in veteran trumpeter Kishore Sodha that year for their live act — his collaborators range from legendary Hindi cinema composer R.D. Burman to current Bollywood favorites Vishal-Shekhar.

The first public hint of XX, however, came last year with the release of their mellow murder ballad “Frank Brazil”, a reggae-driven ode to Indian revolutionary Udhham Singh (aka Frank Brazil) who avenged the 1919 Jallianwala Bagh massacre by assassinating British official General Michael O’Dwyer.

But mellow is relative — XX, with all its left-wing political urgency and unabashedness, comes at a time of expression-crippling, Modi-era malaise and vilifies much of that, disregarding the recent culture of clampdown on freedom of speech. That's evident right from the album title: “It's evocative of something which could be pretty censored, of an adult nature,” explains Kaye. “It could be toxic or poisonous; we liked the idea that like the image is defaced and the content deemed not acceptable.”

Donn Bhat Tones it Down

One-man electro-rock band
Donn Bhat explores
technology and existentialism
on his minimalistic new EP,
'Connected'

ON HIS THIRD RECORD, ELECTRO-rock artist Donn Bhat has learnt that less is more. He says about *Connected*, "I've tried to do less. I think as a producer you realize you can say a lot more by doing a lot less, sometimes. So for me, this record is toning down a lot and going slightly minimal with my approach to ideas."

The vocalist-guitarist-producer's approach also changed when, according to him, he drew a running theme through all five tracks on *Connected* — unlike 2012's *One Way Circle* and 2013's *Passenger Revelator*. Says Bhat, "Most of these songs are about the situations and challenges we find ourselves in as individuals, as lovers, as friends. And also as people who are dealing with a lot of



technology — how that affects us, what do we lose and what do we gain."

So while EP-opener and title track "Connected" communicates ironic emoji-era pathos ("You got me/I'm never signing out/I'm never gonna leave/ You're the one I love/ You're my plastic friend"), Bhat loads up on the airy synths and existentialism on "Spinning World" ("Spinning world/ Did you notice?/ Night from day/ Aren't you bored yet/ Of spin-

ning away?"). A sarangi-tinted "The Storm" follows similar trippy suit, while "When The Beer is Over" veers towards angsty nostalgia, recalling Bhat's years "growing up in Delhi" and the "friendships formed at that point". "Desh Bhakti," on the other hand, sees Bhat experimenting with a Hindi chorus for the first time: "We're hoping it's going to be our Honey Singh song that's going to make us millions," he jokes about the dark Teddy Boy Kill-esque track.

Connected — which releases next month — saw Bhat take year-old live staples to his home studio and a few other studios around Delhi to record vocalist and long-time collaborator Ashhar Farooqui. He also worked with Kolkata-based ace producer Miti Adhikari (of Coldplay, Radiohead and Foo Fighters fame) to mix the record: "We took four nights in Cal [to mix]; we had quite a party actually," recalls Bhat. "It was a great experience."

Apart from tentative shows next month with his live band Passenger Revelator (comprising Farooqui, percussionist Anand Bhagat and occasionally, sarangi player Sohail Yusuf Khan), Bhat is already plotting his next EP: "This (*Connected*) is still song-driven and lyrical but the next one is going to be very instrumental. I've already started work on that."

NABEELA SHAIKH

Harman Professional Solutions launches first DJ Arena

The music gear brand showcased some of its best equipment at the Indian DJ Expo 2016 held recently

HARMAN PROFESSIONAL SOLUTIONS, a leader in professional sound, light, video and control equipment, organised its first Harman DJ Arena at the Indian DJ Expo 2016 from June 30th to July 2nd. The Expo was held at Pragati Maidan in New Delhi.

Harman Professional India has created a platform for the DJ community to showcase their talent to entertainment professionals from across India. A DJ competition was held in which EDM DJs competed over three days. After a tough battle that saw participation by artists from across India, Delhi-based DJ V-Tek was declared winner. The headlining DJs for each night were DJ Whosane, DJ's Nina & Malika and DJ Brianoid & Manasi Scott respectively.

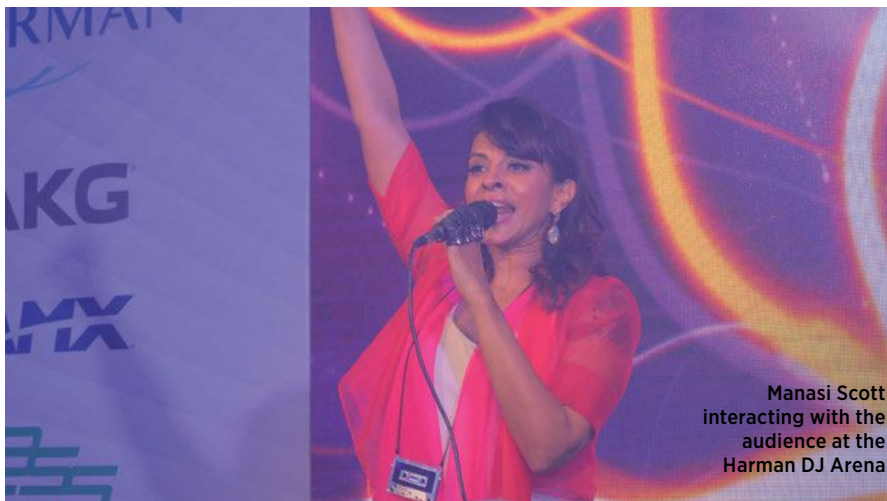
Also on show at the Expo were the four sound solutions by JBL's Marquis Range. These included the MD7 subwoofer system; the MD49, a low-frequency system; the MD55 designed for the mobile DJ requiring a light weight portable system; and the MD52 also designed for the mobile DJ, which is a medium power passive full-range system.

Martin by Harman took centre stage with their entertainment lighting products which included the Mac Aura, the first LED moving head wash light to combine multicolour beam LEDs with a backlight LED. The RUSH MH 6 Wash is a fully pre-mixed color

system and it also offers electronic dimming and strobe effects. The RUSH MH3 BEAM is a powerful beam that blasts an intense and narrow long-throw beam. The Atomic 3000 LED is not only a strobe but also a creative tool that incorporates backlight illumination.

"Indian urban population is entertainment crazy and their idea of clubbing is directly linked to good music, sound and a creative DJ, thus giving us the opportunity to invent and create the best in class club audio solutions," said Prashant Govindan, Senior Director, Professional, Harman India.

ROLLING STONE INDIA



Manasi Scott
interacting with the
audience at the
Harman DJ Arena

COURTESY OF THE ARTIST (DONN BHAT)



YOUR IDEAL MUSICAL COMPANION: LeEco

LeEco's latest Leme Bluetooth headphones are perfect for everyone—from music lover to fashion enthusiast and luxury traveler

Staying true to their label as innovators, Chinese electronics company LeEco has dipped into the audio market with their latest range of headphones, available exclusively on their online store www.lemall.com. The cutting-edge Leme Bluetooth Headphones feature a streamlined, vibrant design and hope to present a more powerful, detailed sound than its preceding generation.

Ideal for everyone from the luxury traveler to fashion enthusiast and the original music lover, the Leme headphones feature something for everyone. Available in various colors [including red, blue, orange, white and pink] the headphones are marked by a sleek design, with the various components merging seamlessly to create an interesting Tron Legacy meets Sixties look. The

volume and track controls blend inconspicuously into the design as well, making the headphones seem like a stylish headband rather than a bulky listening device.

Light and wireless, LeEco's bluetooth headsets are easy to pack and easy to wear. They won't get in your way during a long flight, while commuting through the urban jungle or while you're dancing in the solace of your bedroom.

The minimalistic but cushioned on-ear speakers are designed to cut down the bulkiness usually associated with headphones without compromising on sound. They feature a pair of 40mm moving coil drivers with triple frequency equilibrium to boost bass performance while also delivering the details of each song.

In comparison to the first generation of the Leme headphones, LeEco have reduced standby power consumption and increased the transmission distance from the Bluetooth enabled device to the headphones. In addition to being compatible with all Le Superphones, Letv Super TVs, the Bluetooth 4.1 system adopted by the Leme headphones links easily to iPhones, iPads and Android devices.

And although they look like a million bucks, they don't cost nearly as much! Head over to lemall.com to grab your own pair for under Rs. 2,499.



Punk On Toast on Record

Mumbai punk rock band take digs at Bollywood and politics on new album



WHEN GUITARIST Aditya Naik talks about performing at one of Mumbai's best-known club venues Blue Frog with his band Punk On Toast, his mind always goes back to a particularly notorious 2012 show. Naik – then 19 years old and probably under the influence of something or the other – played a subpar set, broke his guitar string and even took a dig at the club's high-end clientele, almost burying their chances of performing there again. Naik says matter-of-factly, "Last time we played with [Mumbai punk rockers] The Lightyears Explode at Blue Frog, it was a very disastrous gig for us."

After four years and a lot of gained maturity, Punk On Toast performed in March this year at Blue Frog and returned for a gig in June as well. The band, which also includes bassist Prathamesh Sadansing, drummer Kalidas Shenoy and guitarist Yogesh Lokare, have become mainstays in the country's somewhat small punk rock circle, picking up shows in Bengaluru and Chennai earlier this year.

The as-yet-untitled full-length album is also underway

with the band completing live drum recording and slotting guitar, vocals and bass recording with Ahmedabad-based Uddipan Sarmah at his BlueTree Studio. Naik says, "I believe we sound best when we play live."

The 12-track album includes the band's latest songs like "My Friends," in which Naik reminisces about attending [annual rock gathering] Independence Rock. Then there's "Being Inhuman," which takes aim at Bollywood actor Salman Khan, whom Naik describes as "the king of fuckups." Another ripper called "Caught in the Divide" is about "how an average citizen of India basically finds himself isolated," according to Naik. That falls in line with the band's already anti-government stance on songs like "Modi-fied" and they recall more current events with "MH 370," which takes its name from the 2014 South East Asian flight that mysteriously disappeared. Punk on Toast, however, make it an entirely pop punk affair, with Naik's anthemic closing refrain of "I'm Never Coming Home." Looks like band's new record will check all the boxes for fans – fast, fun and irreverent.

ANURAG TAGAT

POP STUFF

BY SOLEIL NATHWANI

New News, Old Blueprints



At a recent dinner in New York, I was catching up with a close friend from Mumbai. We were trying Sichuan hot pots in a new east village spot and she was enthusiastically describing a sea change in India with respect to the female narrative. She cited feminist zine, *The Ladies Finger*, as a place where women explore taboo topics. So, I asked her; is it changing perceptions? Well, she told me, yes, but it's mostly preaching to the converted. We assume that more access and more freedom of expression means more open minds. But as our news feed spills over with options we consume what resonates. I can be the 'educated liberal' who gets my news from John Oliver and my Chinese food in Alphabet City, but does that make my point of view any less limited?

While globalization has become a 21st-century mantra, isolation has become its unlikely twin. Americans obsess over Trump, gun violence and racial inequality, Brits over Brexit and Indians over a globetrotting Modi. Sports fans dive from Euro 2016 into the Olympics and activists fixate on their crisis of choice. Climate change, discontent fueled by income inequality and cyber warfare might be the most prevalent threats but they take a backseat as we pick headlines, blogs and channels tailored to our tastes. As opinions proliferate across burgeoning networks, each one takes more of a stance to stand out. In tuning in to a voice, whether it is Sean Hannity on Fox or Arnab Goswami on *The Newshour Debate*, we risk becoming more passive players in our interaction with world events. Are we spouting our own opinions or those of our favourite pundits; can we even tell the difference? Only last month Facebook announced an update to their news feed prioritizing posts from family and friends. Ironically, the platform that propelled the Arab Spring ensures that, while six degrees of separation holds true, our world view is dominated by just one or two.

Groupthink is exacerbated as narratives on center stage are driven by the most powerful nations. On June 12, in an Orlando nightclub, the US experienced its deadliest mass shooting. While this was deservedly emblazoned across every front page, the 20 people dead in air strikes in Syria that day went largely unnoticed. Last month when Jihadists killed scores in Istanbul, Bangladesh, Baghdad and Saudi Arabia, coverage seemed perfunctory in comparison to effusive pages following the Paris attacks last year. The news dances circles around Trump because we'd rather debate a racist quip from a podium bully than hear from, let's say, a women's rights activist. And what more proof that we're woefully unaware of what the other side believes than surprise that an exclusionary bigot is a US presidential frontrunner.

We can't read every point of view. But we can become more open minded by engaging the opinion furthest from us and more informed by reading the buried stories. So if you're a liberal, watch a conservative talk show; if you think that feminists are 'feminazis', spend an hour reading *The Ladies Finger* and if you feel Islam is the problem, take a deep dive into the disenfranchised communities spawning radicals. The scale of information flow alone won't expand our horizons, unless we try something new on the menu.

The author is a former hedge fund manager-turned-film producer and magazine writer. Twitter: @whats_cutting

Børns: 'Everything in Music and Art is Cyclical'

American indie-pop singer Garrett Børns discusses his love for all things vintage and why music and fashion go hand in hand

IF SOCIAL MEDIA RANTS ARE ANYTHING to go by, fans of breakout artist Garrett Børns aka Børns are mighty pissed that their little secret is no longer a secret, or for that matter, little. It's no use keeping things under wraps when pop star and social media mammoth Taylor Swift exposes your private hero to the world. ("So 'Electric Love' by Børns sounds like an instant classic to me..... #justsayingggg @garrettbørns," she tweeted sometime ago)

It was in 2014 that 24-year-old Børns started garnering a following with his self-released debut EP *Candy*. Its lead single "10,000 Emerald Pools," with its breathy falsettos, Caribbean-esque beats and harp-like guitars, was a declaration of a new, sound – familiar but undeniably proprietary. His full-length album *Dopamine* [released in 2015] flits between Eighties' electro-pop and Seventies' rock, culminating into something that is the quintessence of California. At some points you can hear the Bee Gees and Prince while certain songs echo David Bowie and the Beach Boys. "Those are bands that I grew up listening to, so I'm constantly studying their repertoire," says Børns over the phone from Copenhagen where he has a show later that night. *Dopamine* was produced by Emile Haynie and Jeff Bhasker, both of who worked on Lana Del Rey's *Born to Die* and Kanye West's *My Beautiful Dark Twisted Fantasy*.

Now on tour with British folk rock band Mumford & Sons, Børns feels things have a funny way of coming around. "I met Marcus [Mumford] when I first put out the *Candy* EP and I played a private show in Los Angeles," he recalls. Mumford later came up to Børns to tell him how much he loved the music. "Almost two years later I'm playing a show with them, so it's cool!" An India tour might be a possibility too. "Hopefully I'll be able to [perform in India] after the next album," he says.

If you've watched any of Børns's [highly stylized] videos, you would know that he takes his on-screen looks very seriously. They're mostly vintage with an idiosyncratic personal touch. "Everything in fashion and music and art is cyclical," he explains. "It comes in waves and everything kind of comes back." However, while he takes inspiration from the bygone era, he is sure his sense of style is very much a product of the present. "I want to do something new, contemporary. Even the way the album is recorded, I want it to be 'today' and modern." Case



BORN TO BE WILD: Garrett Børns aka Børns is currently working on his second album

in point, his *After Dark Sessions* on his Vevo channel where he performed string versions of his songs in eerie-elegant videos. "I was kind of inspired by these old videos of Colin Blunstone who's the lead singer of The Zombies," Børns says. "He did some performances just with strings and him and I was a big fan of those videos so I wanted to recreate that."

Visual aesthetics are a big part of Børns's artistry. Most times he looks like a Nineties' child who has stepped out of Sixties' Woodstock. "I've always sort of worn random clothes that I'll find at thrift shops or clothes from friends that are girls." His love for crop-tops, leather jackets, lace shirts and funky prints break gender stereotypes. "Whatever you wear while you're perform-

ing, people are watching that while they're listening to the music, so it's a visual experience as well," he says.

The philosophy in his lyrics also makes one wonder if Børns is indeed from this generation. "I read a lot of lyrics, titles and poems on the side and when it comes to writing a song, sometimes those words infiltrate themselves into a melody I'm working on," he says. As of now it's unclear if his upcoming sophomore album will feature the same themes of love and longing as *Dopamine*. He won't reveal a thing. "It's all top secret," says Børns with a laugh. "But it's going to be very different. I wish I could articulate it at this point but it's just a lot of ideas bouncing around in my head."

RIDDHI CHAKRABORTY

NICK WALKER



ROCKIN' IN THE FREE WORLD Neil Young performing at The SSE Hydro, Glasgow, Scotland in June

Neil Young's New Harvest

After a divorce, he's back in L.A. with a new band and a new love. But he's still got plenty to be pissed off about

BY PATRICK DOYLE

YOU CAN HEAR HIM FROM THE hallway. Neil Young is kicked back on a couch in the center of his suite at New York's Carlyle Hotel one recent morning, stabbing away at the strings of his acoustic guitar. His wet hair is combed back and he's wearing a T-shirt that says EARTH, with jeans and sandals. He places his beat-up 1940s Martin – previous owner: Hank Williams – next to him on the couch. “Sit down, make yourself at home,” he says. Just then, his Samsung phone rings; the ringtone is his own voice shouting “Hello?!” He picks up – a wrong number. “I’ll just turn it off, that’ll solve it.”

Young is in the middle of a quick New York trip, and, as is typical for him, his schedule is ever-shifting. He just decided to do a sketch on *The Tonight Show*, forcing his

team to cancel several interviews today. In front of Young are lyrics to the comedy bit, a song called “Two Neil Youngs Sitting on a Tree Stump,” sent to him by Jimmy Fallon. Young doesn’t like singing his own name, so he’s been tweaking the words with help from his manager, Elliot Roberts. “You’re gonna get a credit on this one,” Young says to Roberts with a smile.

Roberts, 73, has worked with Young since the late Sixties, and the two still speak several times a day. “I’ve never seen him happier,” Roberts says. That’s a recent development, however. In the past few years, several of Young’s close pals died, including longtime film collaborator Larry Johnson and guitarist Ben Keith – losses that Young took hard. Then, in 2014, he parted ways with Pegi Young, his wife of 36 years, and moved

out of Broken Arrow Ranch, the property in Redwood City, California, he had since 1970. “I got a divorce, and I gave my wife the ranch,” he says matter-of-factly. (His son Ben, who has cerebral palsy, still lives at the ranch: “All his support systems are there.”)

Young is dating actress Daryl Hannah, who said a big hello as she stepped into the hotel elevator just now. The couple live in L.A., putting Young in the city “for the first time since *Zuma*.” The move has allowed Young to reconnect with several old friends. “I was so remote for so long,” he says. “All my old friends are now just a few miles away.” One is Stephen Stills, who’s been making music with Young lately. Stills and other friends, including Graham Nash and the members of Crazy Horse, celebrated Young’s 70th birthday in November at L.A.’s Roxy.

ROSS GILMORE/REDFERNS (GETTY IMAGES)



LIKE A HURRICANE “They have no fear,” Young says of Promise of the Real (above). Right: With Daryl Hannah on a stroll in Rome last June.

“Daryl put together a great party,” Young says. “I felt really loved.”

Hannah has helped Young focus on his health, with an organic diet, regular Pilates and a lot of walking. “I like to listen to the animals,” he says. “I like to track the beauty of what’s going on. I enjoy being with the plants and stuff.” Young aimed to capture that beauty on *Earth*, a new live album featuring his most environmentally conscious songs, from “After the Gold Rush” to tracks from last year’s *The Monsanto Years*, on which he attacked the agrochemical giant as a jumping-off point to sound the alarm on the planet’s decline. Young spent months enhancing *Earth* with animal and nature sounds – bees, roosters, crashing waves – that he recorded himself near his house. “There’s a lot going on in the world that isn’t all lovey-dovey and cool beach songs,” he says. “I’ve done all of that.” A week after *Earth*’s release, Young is putting out a new version of *Human Highway*, a 1982 film comedy that he co-directed, about a nuclear disaster that ends the world.

“I arrived in L.A. and joined Buffalo Springfield in 1966,” Young continues. “Since then, we’ve lost 90 percent of the fish we eat from the ocean. There’s only 10 percent of them left, and there’s three times as many of us.” He shakes his head. “It’s math.”

Even for Young, the past decade has been full of left turns. He finally agreed to a Buffalo Springfield reunion tour in 2011, but canceled it after seven shows because he was disappointed with their playing, according to a representative for Young. He’s

ramped up his output, releasing theme albums like *Fork in the Road*, a love letter to his custom electric Lincoln Continental, and *A Letter Home*, cut in a 1947 recording booth at Third Man Records in Nashville. “This is the age where you should have freedom to do whatever you want and put it out.”

The only problem, according to Young, is getting that music heard. His music is not available on streaming services aside from

Tidal, which supports high-quality audio. He spent several years developing his high-resolution Pono music player, which has struggled to catch on. “Technology has done a disservice to music,” he says. “I think there’s a place for rebel radio, with special receivers, where jocks play

what they want: vinyl, new stuff, old stuff, and it’s all analog. Because there’s no variety. It’s all, like, GMO music.”

But Young has plowed ahead anyway. “Just because everything else is broken doesn’t mean I have to be broken,” he says. On *Earth*, he’s backed by Promise of the Real, a band featuring Willie Nelson’s sons Lukas, 27, and Micah, 26. Young first played with them at Farm Aid in 2014, and they have been with him since. They usually join Young onstage after his acoustic

set, and roadies in hazmat suits pretend to spray the stage with chemicals. “They have no fear,” says Young, who loves the three-guitar attack he forms with the Nelsons. “They’re much better players than I am. Lukas is like a gunslinger, and Micah is very ethereal and spaced. So they’re completely different, and I’m somewhere in between.” Where Crazy Horse attack Young’s songs with a garage-y simplicity, Promise of the Real add virtuosity and youthful energy. They grew up on Young’s songs (their band name is inspired by a lyric from “Walk On”), and they’ve learned more than 100 of them, playing three-hour sets including rarities like 1974’s “Vampire Blues.”

“I’ve always wanted to do this, but no one has ever been able to follow it,” Young says.

Recording *The Monsanto Years*, Young and the band drank lots of Amazonian yerba maté tea and smoked home-grown pot in the studio. “He seems like he’s 25,” says Micah. “He gets deeper with age. And danker.”

After he wraps his current tour in October, Young will continue work on *Archives II*, the follow-up to 2009’s *Archives*, which collected unreleased material up to 1972. Young says the project will include *Dume*, an album of songs from the Zuma era, and *Hitchhiker*, an acoustic LP from the mid-Seventies. The major hold-up has been developing technology for presenting the ambitious project: “We’re gonna have a website that’s, like, 60 years of music in chronological order, with links so you can look at my archives and play the music off the high-res source at the same time.” So what’s it like to reflect on all he’s accomplished over the years? “I don’t,” he says. “I need to take a break and go to the bathroom.”

In October, Young and Promise of the Real will play California’s Desert Trip, with Paul McCartney, Bob Dylan, the Who, the Rolling Stones and Roger Waters. “I was amazed that I was asked to be in it,” Young says. But don’t expect him to cater to the audience with a set full of hits. “I don’t give a shit,” he says. “I don’t care what people want to hear – that’s not why I’m playing. I’m not an entertainer in the classic sense. I play what I feel like playing, and I hope the people like it.”



“The world isn’t lovey-dovey stuff and beach songs,” Young says. “I’ve done all of that.”

Hang in Balance to Tour Europe

"I spent only four weeks in England and I spent two months in India last year," says Daniel Waples, one-half of percussion duo

IT'S TAKEN AN ENTIRE DAY to finally get a hold of UK handpan artist Daniel Waples. He's holed up in the greenroom of Bengaluru venue The Humming Tree when he finds time just before he gets on stage with percussionist Monty Manuel for their collaborative project Hang in Balance. Says Waples, "I feel more at home right now in India than I feel back in England." He adds with a laugh that he's had no fixed address for about a decade now.

Waples, originally from London, has been visiting India for 10 years now. He says, "The reason I wanted to come to India during the monsoon [this year] is because I wanted to be here, but not as a tourist. These last couple of trips, I've been going to Goa, to Bombay and different cities." Waples met Manuel – the former drummer for Bengaluru folk rock band Swarathma who now experiments with recycled tubes, paint cans and also takes his place behind a traditional drumkit – at the Ozora festival in Hungary in 2014 and they began working together earlier this year. Waples says, "Monty and I, we've been both been performing as separate solo artists for a few years. We're taking the strongest parts of each other's project and putting them together."

With Manuel taking over percussion drums, Waples has turned innovator by converting the handpan into more than just a melodic percussion instrument. He says, "I'm actually taking the handpan and putting the signal through guitar effects – some of them I'm sending through a bass generator, and some of them through a chorus, reverb and flange/delay effects."

The hang and handpan have become one of the most popular



Daniel Waples at his Mumbai gig

instruments in experimental music in the past decade or so, and Waples counts among the world's best known handpan artists. He's been playing the instrument for a while now and wants to push its evolution. "Can you imagine? The acoustic guitar came along, and then someone had the idea to put a pickup on the acoustic guitar and then they had the idea of putting the acoustic guitar through different effects. That's the same thing that's happening right now, with the handpan. That's what I'm doing."

The duo – who call themselves Hang in Balance – performed in January in Bengaluru and came together for a multi-city tour in June, performing in Hyderabad, New Delhi and Mumbai. After a second round at The Humming Tree in Bengaluru as well, Hang in Balance performed at Café Papaya in Kochi in July. It was all warmup for their Europe sojourn this month, when they'll return to Ozora Festival for a mainstage closing set, as well as shows in France, Germany, Switzerland and Romania. Waples assures his trips won't stop. "I'll be back in India by October."

ANURAG TAGAT

JAZZCORNER

BY SUNIL SAMPAT

What Is 'Real Jazz'? Part II



JAZZ HAS, LIKE A LARGE WIDE RIVER, BEEN a meandering body that has sustained and nourished the people and places it touched. It has been a source of civilization, culture and certainly has brought musical sustenance along its route. I firmly believe that the basic nature of jazz remains the same. Jazz certainly has gathered momentum in its century of flow and has incorporated and absorbed sounds and folk music from elsewhere. Thus the Brazilian bossanova or samba, first introduced into jazz by Stan Getz and his "Girl from Ipanema" and other songs have now become mainstream sound in jazz, and the samba beat is widely used in jazz performance. Earlier, Duke Ellington in conjunction with Juan Tizol brought in some Latin rhythm in composing "Caravan." Dizzy Gillespie had a whole songbook full of compositions with Cuban sounds in the company of Cuban percussionist Chano Pozo. Dizzy's compositions, "A Night in Tunisia," "Tin Tin Deo," "Manteca" and a few others are some of the finest pieces in all of jazz.

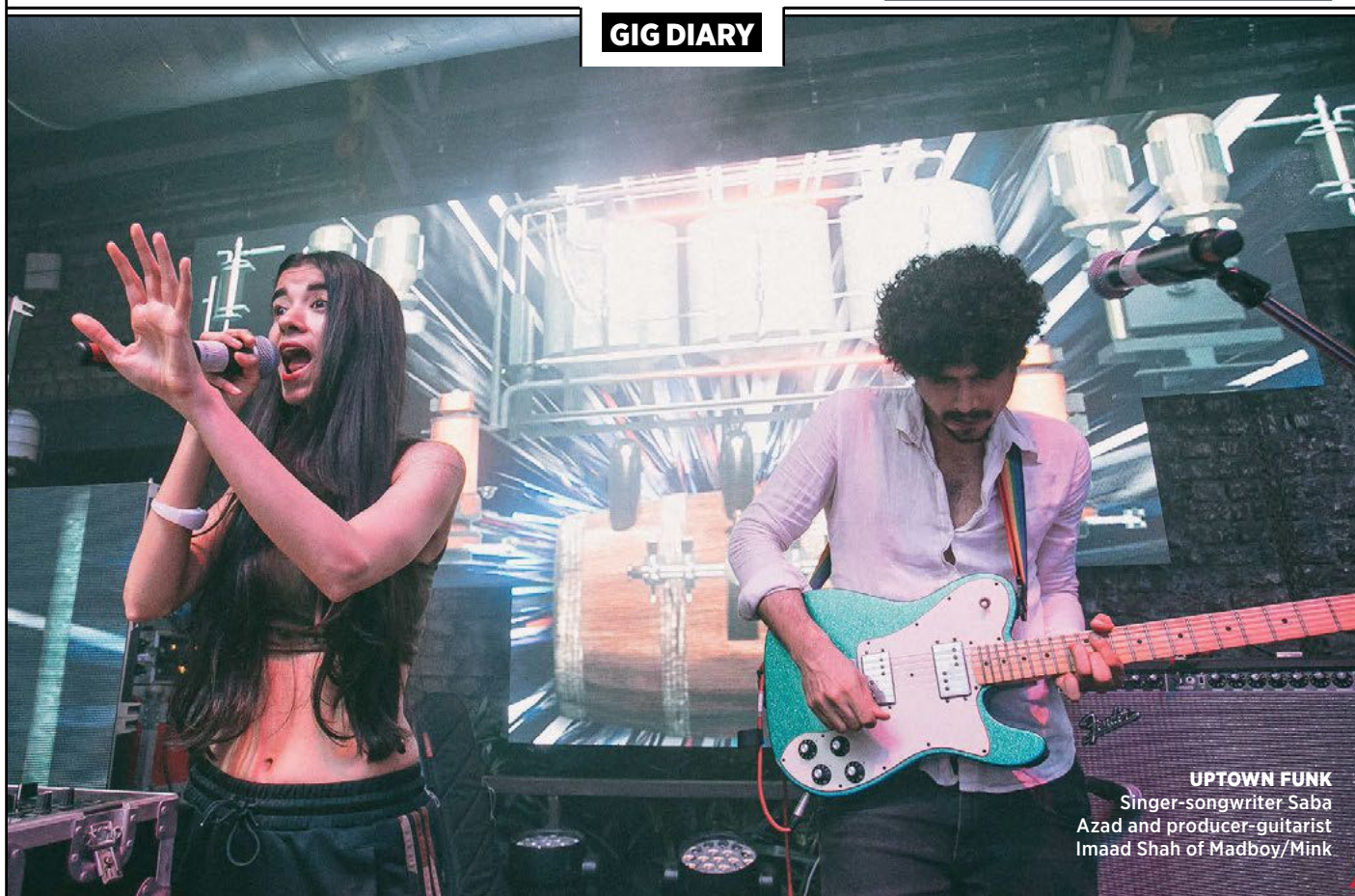
In recent times, tango jazz with very clever use of the accordion and Argentinian style guitar, has enriched the jazz river, as has flamenco jazz. As I was trying to explain to my friend Ms. R in this column last month, when we speak of jazz, the music played may not be a specific sound but it has a definite trend, albeit under a wide umbrella.

The aspect that has confused at least one young generation of jazz listeners is the introduction of the sound of new instruments, particularly electronic instruments. In the late Sixties, Miles Davis embarked into this world of electronic sound as an experiment. The first generation 'synthesizer' in the hands of pianist Herbie Hancock, the clavinet and other electronic instruments created sounds in jazz which were alien to listeners' ears. Though pianists Chick Corea and Joe Zawinul tried their hands with the synthesizer, not too many horn players entered this arena. However, Davis never returned to acoustic sounds and continued with his sound of fusion. A decade after this tangential movement started, a counter movement began that was led by trumpeter Wynton Marsalis and he sought to bring jazz back to its 'roots'. A large body of jazz musicians have returned to the mainstream sound of jazz, experimenting with harmonies and melody but not the structure of the music.

Meanwhile in India, the Seventies' sound of jazz fusion took hold and musicians have taken to this sound wholesale. I have heard a young musician tell me he thought Corea invented jazz, and there is certainly a body of thought that Jaco Pastorius, who played the electric bass, is the father of bass playing! The influence of rock with its amplified guitars and the 'bass guitar' has also influenced our younger "jazz" musicians. In the US, the home of jazz – and jazz innovations – the present generation is now almost exclusively playing the mainstream sound with conventional saxes, trumpets, trombones, acoustic guitars and upright acoustic double bass, while in India the prevailing sound is a *bhelpurity* fusion. This seems to be the inspiration for many young musicians in India, who continue on this divergent tangent. The river of jazz is classical music from the USA and like any other classical music, does not have a sell-by date, any more than the music of Bach, Bethoven or Mozart.

So Ms. R, what you hear in Mumbai and New York don't have much in common. And maybe not all you hear is jazz!

Sunil Sampat is a jazz critic and Contributing Editor of Rolling Stone India. Write to Sunil at jazzwala@gmail.com

**UPTOWN FUNK**

Singer-songwriter Saba Azad and producer-guitarist Imaad Shah of Madboy/Mink

Budweiser MADE Stage, Mumbai

Popular electronic music acts Madboy/Mink, Dualist Inquiry and Kohra played their best chops and pulled in a thick crowd despite the rains

A TECHNO SET FOR A PARTY OPENER MIGHT NOT SEEM LIKE THE BEST IDEA but trust Madhav Shorey aka Kohra to heat things up with a banger. There couldn't have been a better fit than the Delhi-based DJ-producer who went on stage first at the Budweiser MADE Stage and got a post-midnight kind of shindig going the first few minutes into his set. It wasn't even 10 pm. This second season of the concert (the last multi-city edition was held two years ago) featured artists who know their shit – not just as music creators but also as performers. You only had to witness the next performers Madboy/Mink to know that. Vocalist Saba Azad, whom the host Bob Omulo introduced with an question that met with giggles from the millennial crowd [“How many of you in the audience have had a crush on Saba?”] was at her showperson best. Not even a stage the size of an office desk prevented Azad from getting up on it and working her magic on the crowd, dramatic eyes and all. The Mumbai-based electro funk/disco duo played stuff from both their EPs *All Ball* (2014) and *Union Farm* (2015) and even tested new material. It all went outrageously well, of course. The next performer, Delhi-based electronic music producer Sahej Bakshi aka Dualist Inquiry, played a tight set that was quite the treat. His guitar chops were on point and he didn't let one lousy moment creep in. Kudos to the visual artists at the gig who ensured that the party looked and felt larger-than-life with the beer barrel-themed graphics.

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TECH IT
Madhav Shorey aka Kohra kicked off the gig with an intense set



BEAT IT
The closing set at the triple-bill gig was played by Sahej Bakshi aka Dualist Inquiry

COURTESY OF BUDWEISER MADE STAGE

DUALIST INQUIRY: 'People Told Me My Sound Isn't Indian Enough'

SOUND OUT

"I'm personally not into Bollywood music, and it's never been part of my plan," says Sahej Bakshi, better known as Dualist Inquiry



The Delhi-based electronic producer discusses the challenges he faced at the beginning of his career

Following an impressive performance at the Budweiser MADE Stage in Mumbai last month, Delhi-based electronica producer Sahej Bakshi aka Dualist Inquiry couldn't have been happier about step two of the series: heading to Belgium to witness Tomorrowland, one of the world's biggest EDM festivals. "I think it's pretty awesome and remarkable that we're getting these opportunities as indie musicians," says the young producer.

Bakshi was joined by Delhi based DJ Madhav Shorey aka Kohra and Mumbai electro funk/disco duo Madboy/Mink on the trip to Belgium courtesy Budweiser India, where they also got to interact with one of

the festival headliners, Tiësto, and discuss trends in the global electronic music scene.

Although brimming with talented musicians, India still struggles with the task of providing them a platform they deserve. "We don't have the infrastructure of labels, distribution and other ways to get our music out there," says Bakshi about the difficulty of being able to gain a foothold in the international music scene. "It's been hard to pave my own path, but I couldn't be more glad I chose to do it my way." In an exclusive interview with ROLLING STONE India, Bakshi discusses the pressure put on him to join Bollywood when he was starting out, and what it felt like to be featured in Budweiser's 'Brewed The Hard Way' campaign.

How was the experience of performing at the Budweiser MADE Stage last month?

I love playing in Mumbai every time, but this gig was on another level altogether. Our

friends at Budweiser made sure they fitted out the existing venue [Todi Mill Social] with extra bass speakers and a huge audio-visual setup, so it was quite an experience for everyone involved.

How does it feel to be part of the 'Brewed The Hard Way' campaign? You are also the only musician in the 'Brewed The Hard Way' film series [which also featured designer Masaba Gupta and football player Robin Singh]. How does it feel to be representing the indie music community there?

It feels great to be a part of this campaign! I think it's pretty awesome and remarkable that we're getting these opportunities as indie musicians. Here in India, we don't have the infrastructure of labels, distribution and other ways to get our music out there, so such campaigns and partnerships can be especially valuable in reaching new audiences. All in all, Budweiser has been really supportive and there with us. It's an awesome experience.

Since the 'Brewed The Hard Way' campaign celebrates individuals that have paved their own ways despite odds, what are the biggest challenges that you have faced as an artist in India?

When I showed up in India, fresh out of college in 2010, I had really lofty ambitions but I knew nothing and no one from the music scene over here. When I would show my music to people, I heard things like, "You have no vocals in your music, it won't work" or "Your sound isn't Indian enough for India", and most people pointed to Bollywood as the right way to go if you wanted to be a career musician in India. I never considered it even for a second, because I'm personally not into Bollywood music, and it's never been part of my plan. It's been hard to pave my own path, but I couldn't be more glad I chose to do it my way.

What are the other touring/recording projects you are currently working on? Are you planning to release new material anytime soon?

At this point I haven't announced anything yet, but very soon I'll be ready to share some big news.

ROLLING STONE INDIA

COURTESY OF BUDWEISER MADE STAGE

Will Virtual Reality Change Your Life?

How a teenager created Oculus Rift in his parents' SoCal garage, sold it for \$2 billion and may have launched a digital revolution

BY DAVID KUSHNER

FOR DECADES, VIRTUAL REALITY HAS FAILED TO DELIVER ON its great promise. But on March 28th, Oculus Rift, a breakthrough VR system, debuted – finally heralding the arrival of a technology seemingly pulled from a sci-fi future. On a recent spring morning, in a soundproof studio on the San Mateo, California, campus of Facebook – just days before the \$600 Rift's release – I'm testing out the Oculus headset in a mountain-climbing simulation created by Crytek, a team of artists and coders that has spent the past year meticulously scanning and re-creating vistas from the Alps to Halong Bay, Vietnam. The experience, which teleports me to a jagged cliff in a virtual world

spanning 50 square miles, is so realistic that I can barely look down – when I do, my knees buckle and my palms sweat. Finally, my brain has to interrupt: *Dude, you're not really here.*

In the past, heavy headsets, chunky graphics and sluggish latency have hindered the suspension of disbelief in virtual reality. But now, in Oculus' dozens of "experiences," as the company dubs them, you can live out your guitar-god dreams in Rock Band VR, float weightless in deep outer space in *Adrift* or hack through *Tron*-like computer nodes in *Darknet*. In each of these, you're not just playing, you're transported.

Palmer Luckey, the Rift's 23-year-old visionary creator in flip-flops, is giving me an exclusive glimpse into the VR future at Facebook, which bought his startup in 2014 for \$2 billion, landing Luckey on *Forbes'* list of America's richest entrepreneurs under 40. For Facebook co-founder Mark Zuckerberg, Luckey and his crew are bringing the ultimate sci-fi fantasy to life. "Oculus' mission," Zuckerberg stated shortly after the purchase, "is to enable you to experience the impossible."

VR makes the impossible possible by tricking your eyes, and brain, into thinking you're someplace else. The Oculus headset combines motion-sensing hardware, positional tracking and Pixar-level graphics to let you interact with and explore simulated worlds. To crank up the experience of climbing, the developers used photogrammetry – a scanning process through which they capture real surfaces (like the jagged cracks of a limestone perch) into a virtual space.

While companies like *The New York Times* have been producing and distributing what they call virtual reality, seen with inexpensive Google Cardboard viewers, their technology is more like VR-lite: 360-degree videos that keep you stuck in a fixed position as you crane around. The Rift lets you watch these too, but also has the power to deliver a truer VR experience – essentially, putting you *inside* a video game. You move, look and play just as in real life, except the world around you is computer-simulated. "What gives you that next layer of amazingness in VR is that you're the one in control," says neuroscientist David Eagleman. "You can look left and look right, and your brain gets the feedback it expects."

But VR isn't just about games. Silicon Valley, Hollywood and the military are betting on its broader implications because, says Luckey, "they know it's the next major computing platform." And VR is only the beginning. With so-called "mixed reality" headsets, you can see computer-generated objects – say, a flock of virtual sea gulls – float in real space around you. Then there's augmented-reality glasses, transparent displays that let you see information like the name and occupation of a neighbor as she passes by. And with HTC, Sony and Microsoft also rolling out VR gear this year, competition is high. Goldman Sachs predicts all of this to become an \$80 billion industry by 2025. As venture capitalist Marc Andreessen, co-creator of one of the first browsers, Netscape Navigator, said after his firm led an early investment of \$75 million into Oculus, it "will redefine fundamental human experiences in areas like film, education, architecture and design."

VR aims to alter our lives in staggering ways. Instead of chatting with a friend on a webcam, you'll "teleport" into a shared simulation and interact as if you're, for example, walking down a re-creation of the same Brooklyn street together. Instead of watching *Jurassic World* in a theater, you'll look up at a dinosaur slobbering over you. The Virtual Reality Company, a movie studio with Steven Spielberg on its board of advisers, is creating what co-founder Guy Primus calls "one of the first great tent-pole cinematic experiences" for VR, expected to hit headsets this year. It will launch with Spielberg's new film *Ready Player One*, based on the novel of the same name by Ernie Cline, which describes a virtual world of pop-culture past called the OASIS. For the film, Cline reveals, "they're going to create the OASIS for real as an immersive, networked virtual reality that will exist as a real thing. People will go home from the movie and log in and experience it in virtual-reality goggles."

At the same time, concerns about how virtual reality may affect our brains are

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rising. Some researchers worry that the deeper we go into virtual worlds, the further we'll leave this one behind. "There is a very good chance that we will crave VR," says Sherry Turkle, a director at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. "But the promises that VR will enhance our humanity, increase our empathy, all of this, I am afraid are overblown." Yet the verdict is still out. "We as a scientific community just don't know," says Beau Cronin, a computational neuroscientist who studies VR. "The brain might adapt to this new environment in a long-term way. That's entirely plausible."

THE LONG ROAD TO TODAY'S VIRTUAL reality is littered with clunky arcade games (Dactyl Nightmare) and goofy gear (Nintendo's Virtual Boy) that never delivered. "It always seemed like the technology is just around the corner," says Cline. "But then the 21st century came around and it still didn't exist."

Little did anyone know that a prodigy in his parents' garage in Long Beach, California, was going to make VR a reality. Palmer Luckey was home-schooled by his mother, Julie, and weaned as a gearhead by his car-salesman dad, Donald. Encour-

aged to explore his interests, Palmer became a gaming fanatic with a gift for invention. His engineering mishaps are nerd lore: the time he zapped a permanent blind spot onto his retina with a laser; the day he blasted himself across his garage on a Tesla coil. "I got shocked a lot," he once said. "Looking back, it's honestly a miracle I am not dead."

But the mad scientist was also an ambitious entrepreneur. Raising \$36,000 from fixing iPhones, the 16-year-old built the ultimate gaming rig: a headset display that was perfect for VR. Luckey's genius was in realizing that much of the foundation for VR – such as powerful processors and motion-tracking software – was already in place. He just grabbed the parts he needed and hacked them into something new. Luckey ripped apart early off-the-shelf VR headsets, and fixed in alternate displays. Some left him physically sick – a problem caused by the lag between a person's head movements and what's displayed onscreen. Finally, with a mobile PC and a couple of magnifying lenses, he made a VR headset that was cheap, fast and worked.

"I was just screwing around," he says, sitting in Oculus' office. "People who tried it started saying, 'Hey, this is a lot better than anything else that is out there.'" Among them was John Carmack, co-creator of the seminal first-person shooters Doom and Quake. In 2012, he gave Luckey his big break by showing his invention at the Electronic Entertainment Expo, North America's largest video-game trade show, calling it "the best VR demo probably the world has ever seen." Within a month, Luckey raised more than \$2 million on Kickstarter to co-found his company, Oculus, with three friends. He poached an Apple whiz, who refined the motion-tracking sensors and displays for better fidelity. By 2014, they hit the ultimate dot-com lottery: a \$2 billion acquisition from Facebook.

Like Luckey, Zuckerberg sees VR as "a new communication platform," as he put it when he announced the buyout. In the social networking of the future, we will teleport into a virtual world together. "Imagine enjoying a courtship at a game," Zuckerberg stated, "studying in a classroom of students and teachers all over the world, or consulting with a doctor face-to-face – just by putting on goggles in your home."

"Our visions were basically the same, in terms of what we wanted to build," Luckey says about Zuckerberg. "I am a gamer, but if you look at virtual reality and how it's been depicted in science fiction, it's not depicted as a gaming technology." According to the

VR novels that line the cubicles here – William Gibson’s *Neuromancer*, Neal Stephenson’s *Snow Crash*, and *Ready Player One* – we will work, have sex and even die there. “It’s depicted,” Luckey goes on, “as a technology to create parallel digital universes.”

All sorts of nongaming things are already happening in VR. A surgeon in England recently live-streamed the first operation in 360-degree video, which allows medical students to view it in their headsets as though they are seeing it with their own eyes. The Department of Defense has tested Virtual Iraq and Virtual Afghanistan to treat soldiers with PTSD, which allows vets to explore simulations of Middle East scenes in the company of a therapist. The site YouVisit lets anyone upload and share their VR experiences (programmed on a computer or shot with a 360 camera) – from tours of Dartmouth College to fashion shows in Moscow.

As Oculus co-founder and CEO Brendan Iribe, the natty 36-year-old businessman to Luckey’s egghead genius, says of VR, games are just the beginning. “In a decade or two,” he tells me, “there will be this time when more and more of your daily life is spent inside a pair of glasses. You can teleport to the office. You can teleport to London. You can teleport to the Mayan ruins.”

WITH THE DEEP POCKETS of Facebook at his disposal, Luckey spends all his time overseeing the VR factory, where T-shirted young men hunch at workstations, soldering goggles on Styrofoam heads. Unlike most antiseptic dot-coms, there’s real industriousness here. The air smells metallic. A sign on a door reads DO NOT ENTER. ROBOT EXPERIMENTATION IN PROGRESS.

Luckey, a college dropout, seems to relish the shop class he’s made here. Like Zuckerberg, who popularized his Adidas slides, Luckey’s default footwear are flip-flops. His office is dorm-room messy, with a *Back to the Future* poster on the wall. At lunch, he readily joins the line at the cafe, just another man-boy hankering for mac and cheese. “There are days when I do nothing but play games and test things all day long,” he says.

Oculus’ studio head, Jason Rubin, a veteran of the video-game industry and, at 46, twice his boss’s age, says that rather than putting himself in charge, Luckey surrounds himself with biz guys so that he can focus on the big vision. “There aren’t a lot of people his age that have the ability to look

at themselves and say, ‘Actually, I’m not a Mark Zuckerberg. What I am is a far more creative but nonmanagerial person,’” Rubin says, adding it’s all the better for the company. “I live in today, and he lives in the future.”

Right now, Luckey can’t get me back into the future fast enough. Not long after my arrival, he turns to his aide and tells her, “Let’s put him into Bullet Train.” I don my headset and am immediately riding in an empty subway car through a dark, flashing tunnel. As the train screeches to a halt, an army of cyborgs storms at me, guns blazing. I hear bullets whizzing by my ears. A good game of old-fashioned Call of Duty can get my



heart racing, but inside here it’s different – I can’t escape.

But the thrills come at a price. After I log out and tell Luckey I’m feeling “wavy,” he nods sympathetically. Cybersickness is a real phenomenon caused by the fact that your inner ears don’t feel the motion your eyes are perceiving. Cronin says fixing this is “going to remain a challenge for quite some time.” Luckey admits, “VR isn’t perfect right now.” Despite Luckey’s achievement, Oculus and other VR companies are still working to improve the lag between your movements in the headset and what your eyes see – which will further cut down on the queasy feeling. Plus, Luckey says, the more you jack in, the better you feel. “People who use VR more get acclimated a lot easier,” he says.

So what’s to keep Oculus from going the way of Google Glass? One possibility that no one here wants to talk about: porn. There’s a long track record of adult entertainment fueling demand for new technology, and VR is no different. Pornographers, like all game programmers, are free

to create content for VR devices, and, as Todd Glider – CEO of BaDoink, a VR-porn production company – puts it, the industry’s goal is “real telepresence,” engaging your whole body. BaDoink is working with Kiiroo, developers whose “teledildonic” vibrators and orifices pulse and pump along with the action onscreen. Eventually, we may be having virtual sex with one another via dolls, devices and headsets – and the industry is expected to grow to \$1 billion by 2020. “I always say Luckey ought to pay us a referral fee for every sale of Oculus,” Glider says.

In March, when the Rift came out, reviews were mixed. Oculus launched without the wireless Touch controllers that let you manipulate objects, and an “unexpected component shortage” delayed shipment of some Rifts until August. By comparison, the HTC Vive shipped with wireless handsets and also “room scale” VR, which allows you to roam as you, say, dodge zombies. Yet Luckey is dismissive of doubters. “I don’t care if people believe in using the product that we have right now today,” he says. “It’s not the one that billions of people are going to use.” In other words, Facebook has the fortune and reach to make the long bet on VR – which could leave others behind.

Luckey says the longest he’s spent in the Rift is “about 16 hours.” He pauses. “To be clear, I had bathroom breaks and took breaks to eat.” Dr. Frank Steinicke, a professor at the University of Hamburg, spent 24 hours in Oculus VR to study its effects. Besides dried-out eyes and nausea, he experienced strong moments of presence – in one case, feeling colder when his virtual sun went down. “We should be concerned about what VR is doing to us and what it could be doing to the brain,” he says, “and if we wear for long-term, will we lose the ability to communicate in the real world?”

Then again, every new technology provokes skepticism. Luckey is unequivocal about where he’d rather inhabit. “The more time you spend in VR, the grayer the real world gets,” he says. “In VR, you don’t have any rules. That’s a pretty cool place to be.”

So would he want to remain there forever? Luckey falls silent, as if he’s toggling back into the future, letting me fade into gray. “If the VR is indistinguishable from real life,” he replies, “yeah, very possibly.”

GWEN STEFANI WASN'T KID-
ding when she called her new
solo album *This Is What the
Truth Feels Like*. It man-
ages to combine upbeat pop with brack-
ingly honest lyrics about her split from
ex-husband Gavin Rossdale, the
father of her three children. "Even be-
fore I knew that my life would be forever
changed and all my dreams would be
crushed," she says, "I was quite desperate
to make new music." She ended up with
a flood of inspiration that she compares
to No Doubt's 1995 breakthrough, *Tragic
Kingdom*, written in a similar breakup
haze: "I didn't even know I could write
music," she recalls. "And then my heart
was ripped out, and, like, served back to
me on a platter. And this album, I feel
like it just fell out of the sky. It was a
miracle."

**What will it be like to revisit the heart-
break in these songs when you sing them
on your solo tour this summer?**

I'm not in a different place yet. I'm still
heartbroken. You can't have your family
break up and still not be going through
it a year later. I was just cleaning out a
room in my house before I called you. It's
devastating.

**You had another solo album almost done
before this one, which never came out.**

What happened to that?

That was a fake record. I had it, but it
never felt right. I had this opportunity to
be on *The Voice*, so it was like, "You're on
TV, let's put a song out." But I gave birth,
and I was on TV, like, five weeks later. I
was still nursing. There was no way!

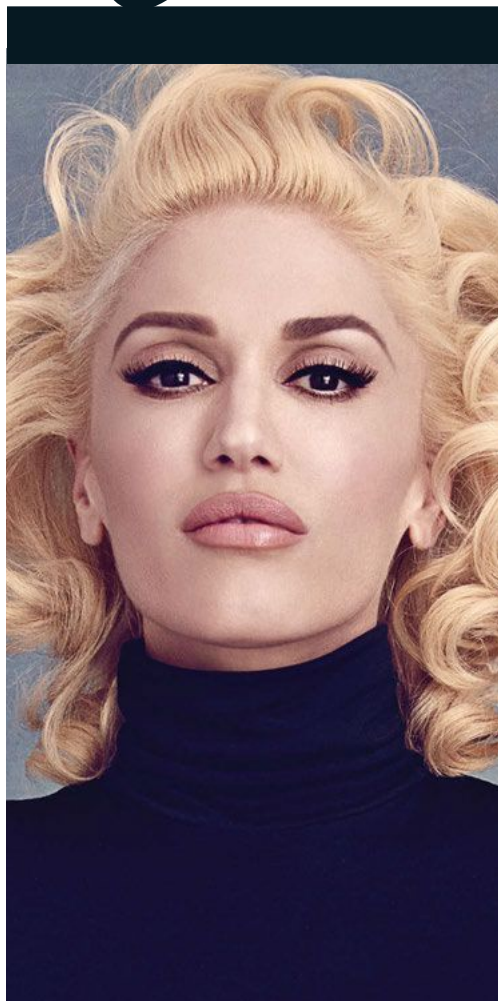
**You worked so hard on the last No Doubt
record, and it didn't connect. Is that
band over?**

I don't know what's going to happen
with No Doubt. When Tony [Kanal] and
I are connected creatively, it's magic. But
I think we've grown apart as far as what
kind of music we want to make. I was
really drained and burned out when we
recorded that album [2012's *Push and
Shove*]. And I had a lot of guilt: "I have
to do it." That's not the right setting to
make music. There's some really great
writing on that record. But the produc-
tion felt really conflicted. It was sad how
we all waited that long to put something
out and it didn't get heard.

**Do you have any issue with the other
members of No Doubt working with
Davey Havok from AFI?**

Of course I don't care. Those are my
homeys from when I was a little girl! I
want them to be happy and do whatever
they need to do to fulfill whatever cre-
ative place they need to fill.

Q&A



Gwen Stefani

The pop-rock icon on No
Doubt's future, the heartache
behind her new solo album,
working with Prince, and
being a little bit country

BY BRIAN HIATT

**You've recorded a duet with [new boy-
friend] Blake Shelton. What do you make
of the country world?**

Being on *The Voice* helped open my
mind to all kinds of music. My parents
loved folk and bluegrass – my first con-
cert was Emmylou Harris. And at the
end of the day, a song is a song. You can
take a country song and make it into a
dance track. It's all about how it's pro-
duced.

**You collaborated with Prince a couple of
times. What was that like?**

He was such a genius that you can't
believe he existed. I was onstage with
No Doubt in Minneapolis in the
Nineties, and I saw his silhouette in the
audience. I was like, "How is this hap-
pening?" Later, I sent him the demo to
this song "Waiting Room" – he called
and said, "Hey, I had to rewrite the song,
but I think you're going to like it." He
played on the version you hear on [No
Doubt's] *Rock Steady*, and I sang on his
album. He sat at the board and sang me
every single note. I was in there for, like,
eight hours.

**"Hollaback Girl" has become such a sig-
nature song for you. How did you and
Pharrell Williams write that one?**

Back then, I felt scared to be around
Pharrell. He's supercute, and he's so tal-
ented. It hurts you! But I knew that in
that song, I needed to get back at some-
body for talking shit on me. And I want-
ed it to sound like a cheer. I explained it
to him, and he said, "I have this beat." He
also said, "Gwen, you're too good, you
don't need to holla." When we finished
the song, we were literally doing the Tom
Cruise on the couch. And the label was
scared to put it out – they waited until the
third single! Isn't that crazy?

**Is it tough having to live up to songs like
that?**

When you have a long career, you do
get insecure. How do I do something
new that doesn't sound like something I
did before? How do I compete with how
great "Hollaback Girl" was – and aren't
we going to sound like the girls that *tried*
to sound like that? But this album was
supertriumphant for me.

**The Nineties were such a dude-heavy
time in music. Is it fun to see women
dominating pop?**

It's such a weird time in music. Every-
one is listening to whatever their playlist
is. Whereas before, we were kind of told
what we were all going to be into. There's
some really great stuff out there, and
some really horrible stuff. I feel sorry for
some people that these are the songs they
have to grow up listening to. But doesn't
every generation end up feeling that? **rs**

Goddess Gagged Returns

Mumbai alternative metal band reunites after nearly three years to head out on the fourth edition of the 2Stroke Tour series this month

In November last year, what was meant to be an internal communication between the members of Mumbai alt metal band Goddess Gagged was sent out to their public official page. Frontman Siddharth Basrur had posted, "Reunion tour '16? I know someone who really wants to make it happen. If everyone's interested, I'll spill more details." Bassist Krishna Jhaveri says that message was supposed to show up on a private group the band had created for themselves. Basrur adds, "In the span of two days, this 'mistake' just got so much attention from fans."

Best known for their friendly yet fierce bounce-around brand of post-hardcore and metal, guitarists Devesh Dayal and Arman Menzies noodling out one complex melody after another, the band released their debut album *Resurfaces* in 2011 and played country-wide until they went on an indefinite hiatus in January 2014. Dayal moved to the Berklee College of Music in Boston for a four-year course in music, drummer Jeremy D'Souza also went to Musicians Institute in Los Angeles. Menzies got serious about his electronic music project Zokhuma and Jhaveri was already part of instrumental metallers Pangea and rockers Indus Creed. Basrur, too, became involved with several projects, both commercial and independent, including alt rockers Last Remaining Light. Says Basrur, "When Last Remaining Light played the 2Stroke Tour (in 2015), Uddipan (Sarmah, co-founder of event and artist management company BlueTree) asked if Goddess Gagged would be interested in touring." Sarmah explains his reasons for wanting Goddess Gagged, "I don't really consider them to be a metal band. And for the tour, I want to keep things interesting. I don't want to pick obvious bands." The band's 2Stroke Tour run includes seven cities between August 26th and September 4th, crossing over for the first time to play in Kolkata and Guwahati, and return to Shillong, Pune, New Delhi, Bengaluru and close off with a homecoming Mumbai show.



Basrur says he thought the band would never get back together, owing to their busy schedules and spread-out locations. Jhaveri and Dayal's biggest priority right now, though, is Delhi prog metal band Skyharbor, who are working on their next full-length album. Now, individual practice sessions are on and they'll spend five days together once Dayal flies in from Boston a week ahead of the tour. Jhaveri says the setlist will include most of *Resurfaces* as well as two newer tracks, "Fine Lines" (their

BACK ON STAGE

Goddess Gagged's seven-city tour starts on August 26th. (Left) Vocalist Siddharth Basrur; (Top) the band onstage at the Control ALT Delete gig in 2013

last single) and "Handmade Waterfalls" (their next single). Basrur says he hasn't heard their songs in at least two years. "I probably have to buy the album," he jokes, but later adding that songs like "Modern Machines," "Sink or Swim" and "Rosemary's Baby" feature "some of the best vocal melodies I've written." Jhaveri adds that he's always been proud of the music, "It stands in our mind and that's yet another reason to get into it."

The band can ride the reunion tour wave for now, but Jhaveri says there's no way they'll return to a dormant state and get back to their respective projects. The bassist adds, "The focus will be to work on new stuff. Skyharbor finds a way to do it across the world. I think we can also find a way. Before we play again, we do want to put something out."

ANURAG TAGAT

PRASHIN JAGGER

Vader Declare War

The Polish death metal band, who headlined Bangalore Open Air last month, talk about Satanism, playing in India and their upcoming full-length album

BY ANURAG TAGAT

FOR A BAND THAT TOOK ITS name from the *Star Wars* movie franchise back in 1983, it's surprising to hear Polish death metal band Vader's frontman Piotr Wiwczarek say he's not a "diehard" fan of the fantasy film series. His comment is even more intriguing since "The Imperial March" aka Darth Vader's theme came on after the band finished mauling their way through their India debut set at metal festival Bangalore Open Air (BOA), held last month.

Wiwczarek says over a Skype call from Bialystok in northeastern Poland, "I remember the first three episodes – there was the fourth, fifth and sixth. They were very dark and totally different, but I was much younger, so I took that in a different way. I didn't like the first episode too much – when Anakin was a kid. It was just a bit childish, you know? Typical Hollywood movie."

Wiwczarek and the band – currently comprising guitarist Marek Pająk aka Spider, bassist Tomasz Halicki and drummer James Stewart – ran through classics such as "Sothis" and "Chaos" in their career-spanning set at BOA. Easily one of the most finest death metallers you'll hear on a big stage,

Vader had each listener awestruck at some point during their hour-long performance.

When we spoke to Wiwczarek, he was in Bialystok recording Vader's upcoming 11th full-length album, called *The Empire*. While that's set to release in November via Nuclear Blast Records, the band has an EP, *Iron Times*, ready for an August 12th launch. Says Wiwczarek, "It's more of a promotional record before the full-length album."

In an exclusive interview with ROLLING STONE India, Wiwczarek talks about their upcoming releases and metal in Poland. Excerpts:

How long have 'Iron Times' and 'The Empire' been in the works?

I can't say much about the album yet. It's almost done, but it's not done. What I know is that it's going to be released on November 4th, so we've got time. There's the EP called *Iron Times*, which is already done and it's ready to go. We prepared two songs for the EP and two covers. One of the covers ["Overkill"] is my personal tribute to Lemmy and Motörhead. He was a big icon. He was a good musician and a good man.





ON INDIAN SHORES
Vader performed a flawless set at Bangalore Open Air last month

We have a chance to pay respect to him through this cover to let it be known that the music is never going to die.

The other cover ["Piesc I Stal"] is not so much a cover. It's something I composed 10 years ago for the other metal project I had called Panzer X. That was pretty much a... combination of metalheads from different generations. One of the songs fits perfectly into the concept of the new album [*The Empire*], which is all about this frustration and the war tensions in the world now. We try to talk about that. These songs, I wrote the lyrics in Polish. It's been decades since I've done something in my home language [laughs].

A lot of Polish bands like to sing in their own language. Why don't you do it more often?

English is just like an international language for metal, you know? We use this because it's probably the easiest way to learn and to communicate with everybody.

I know that in metal, in this music, lyrics were never as important as it is in rock music, but they are there. It's words and words mean emotions. If I write a song, I put my emotions into it. It'd be good to know that people, even those who can't speak English, can understand it. [laughs]

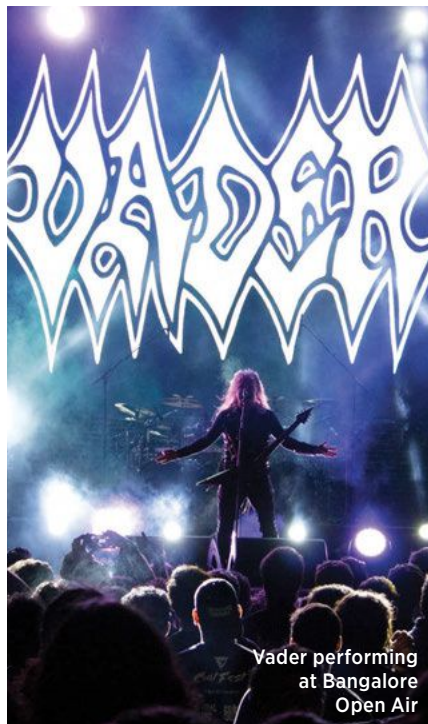
I'm glad if people can use their imagination and interpret it. Our lyrics are pretty much about... they sound like fantasy. They sound like supernatural stories, but they're real. I just put real emotions about my real experience in the world into these stories. If I write something about hell, it doesn't mean I'm writing about just devils and things. I may write about hell like if it was on Earth. Like a war.

War is hell and everybody knows that. Everybody knows there's more to war than just any story book. It's good to remind humanity about this. They forget about it...

Is war a major theme on 'The Empire' as well?

I named the album *The Empire*, because it's a term that's pretty much connected to things like corruption, politics, war, territorialism and greed. It's also connected to the *Star Wars* movie *The Empire* [Episode V]. It's not meant to be funny, just because we're Vader [laughs]. The movie was talking about that – how to fool people to go and die, just to get more territory, you know?

I use all these symbols on our albums. The previous one was called *Tibi Et Igni*, and I focused on the symbol of fire and the different aspects of humanity. This time, because wars keep getting crazier, it's about violence. There's so much about war and violence, about why we're doing that on this album. This is the main concept of the album, but it's not all just about that. There's one song



Vader performing at Bangalore Open Air

"I named the album 'The Empire,' because it's a term that's connected to things like corruption, politics, war..."

called "No Gravity", it's a picture of what I see on stage when I see the real crazy fans. Moshing, jumping into the crowd, diving – it looks like there's no gravity [laughs].

Vader regularly tours Poland – what have you noticed about the demand for metal over the decades?

It's a very special country. There's a lot of fans, but Poland never supported this music. We even had a problem because of that. Poland has very deep Christian traditions... If we're talking about the devil and hell in our lyrics, many politicians try to blame bands for creating evil cults. They don't want to understand the symbolic meaning. We use this language and the symbols to talk to people. Nobody blames movie directors for making a horror movie around Satan or whatever, they're not called Satanists.

But it's all about respect. If we respect somebody, we expect it from the other side as well. It's how it should work. Poland also has this historical background about freedom and liberation. We're apparently a liberal country for people who believe in different things, but the reality is totally different. I know that from the inside. I watch the

news on the TV and sometimes, I want to cry. Maybe that's why every Vader album is so aggressive [laughs]. That's my way of screaming and spreading out the anger. I don't understand why people who are so stupid get power and rule other people. This is what I can do. This is my voice. I'm so glad that many fans think the same way. That brings hope for the future.

I read a 1997 interview where someone asked if you were Satanists. Do you still get that kind of question in Poland or elsewhere?

Sometimes. The answer is not the same. When I started to listen to the music and play metal, I was very much an Orthodox Christian. I was a teenager. What I knew was my yard, my city. I tried to be evil-looking, just to scare people, just to be different. I couldn't accept this grey, boring world around me. For that phase, Satanism was great, but it was pure rebellion.

After many years, I had traveled around the globe and learnt so much – I'm still a rebel, but I'm smarter... I would say I'm a Satanist just because I use Satan's symbol to rebel. In the Bible, he was a rebel. It doesn't mean I respect and adore evil. I use the name as someone who doesn't agree with everything that's happening in the world, with political decisions, wars and the violence. That's why, even today, if somebody were to ask, I would say, 'Yes, I'm a Satanist'. If you mean an evil guy who sacrifices humans or something at the altar, then no.

Next month, [blackened death metal band] Behemoth will also play in India. What, if anything, would you say are the similarities between the bands?

The whole scene in metal, in the Eighties, had a chance to rise just because we were friends. Maybe today, the situation seems to be that the bands fight for a place or something like that. It's mostly fans who try to say, 'My band's better than yours'. We know each other – the Behemoth guys, the [death metallers] Decapitated guys – we're friends. We're always happy if the other guys gain something – if they win an award or a good response at shows. It feels pretty nice, which is why we, as metal bands, are a brotherhood. We should be like that.

I know there are bands that cannot understand this and they don't give a fuck – they just want to be famous. If they play on a stage, they don't care about the other bands. This is the rock star syndrome. We never accepted that. I saw many young bands who like to be like rock stars – they kick the other bands' asses and take everything. But we're all humans, you know? We can't be all good. That'd be boring. We need to have the bad people and the assholes and there are many of them around.

Cosmic Infusion Plot Second Record

Frontman Sushan Shetty on the Mumbai symphonic black metal band's sophomore album which is due later this year



TAKE TWO
Mumbai
metallers
Cosmic Infusion

Since they returned to the drawing board last year, Cosmic Infusion have already come up with – and then scrapped – “about three entire songs, a lot of half-songs and a bunch of fantastic riffs”, frontman and keyboardist Sushan Shetty tells us. “We’ve been writ-

ing stuff, we’ve been discarding stuff. It’s like small babies lying on my computer that probably will never see the light of day... We could probably have another album with a B-side,” he says.

The material that did survive, however, is making its way to the Mumbai symphon-

ic black metal band’s second record, a full-length album due later this year. Shetty (who’s big on incorporating imagery in his lyrics) isn’t keen on giving away details, but promises that the as-yet-untitled release is going to be unique. “We’re working on a fantastic concept that no one’s done – especially not in India,” he says. “There’s a theme on the album and there are a few stories that stick around the theme.”

And then there’s the blastbeat-driven, synth-possessed music itself. While Cosmic Infusion established bleak grandiose with their 2013 self-titled debut EP, record number two seems to be headed in an even more harrowing direction, going by live material like “The Scream”, “Raktabeeja” and “Road to Freedom, Road to Death”. “We work a lot on the sound as much as we work on the composition. In our heads the sound is very clear,” explains Shetty.

There’s also another song currently in the works which the frontman explains is “representative of the entire sound of the album.” He says, “It’s very challenging and epic and includes ‘more [French] horns than all of India’s cars put together’.”

NABEELA SHAIKH

DIARY OF A MADMAN #2

Do Tribute Gigs Deserve Cover-age?

“Are tribute gigs cancer to the Indian metal scene?” asks mad scientist Dr. Hex

Albatross at a recent tribute gig



Some of you may have wondered why I did not have a status message pertaining to this ‘hot topic,’ and the answer is because I wanted to be paid for my opinion. Ta-daa!

What am I talking about? If you’re connected with musicians from the Indian music circuit on social media, you must have seen updates by them asking you to come and support them while they pay tribute to their favourite artists [if you haven’t, I’m afraid to say you know some terrible musicians]. Even personally, with Albatross, I was part of an Ozzy and a Motörhead Tribute [which was part of a Prince, The Eagles and Stone Temple Pilots Tribute, ie. Gigception], and quite honestly had a blast at both shows. But are tribute gigs cancer to the Indian metal scene? Or can a liberal balance of tribute and non-tribute shows enhance the scene? Can the Indian metal circuit Aries, I mean ‘arise’ to its potential, when tribute gigs are, quite often, the most

profitable option? Let’s find out, shall we?

One point that I felt held a lot of weight was that we’re regressing to the early 2000s, where tribute gigs were the norm. I daresay I don’t think this is a genuine assessment though. While I’m oblivious to most of the non-metal shows that happen in the city, there hasn’t been this many metal gigs in a while. On an average, three metal shows happen every month in Mumbai/Navi Mumbai. Even as someone who attends metal shows, I am spoilt for choice. While none of these shows pay as much as tribute gigs do, most of these venues are packed to the hilt quite often. I’d say the sheer volume of gigs has never been greater for metal bands. So, what’s the harm in playing tribute gigs in this booming scenario?

Is it ethical to make money from someone else’s music? I think it is. I’ve never known any musician to be put off by bands paying tribute to them. I remember Warrel Dane

putting up a Facebook status recently, about how he was going to attend a Nevermore tribute show, fold his arms and stand in front of the singer in the front row. Epic metal legends Manilla Road constantly post covers of their music on social media. John Gallagher from Raven was all praise for our cover of “The Savage and the Hungry”, as he was for all the other bands on the compilation CD that comes out this year.

In conclusion, I don’t think tribute gigs are detrimental to the scene, and are a lot of fun to attend, even as a spectator. It shows your musical lineage to your own fans, and help them gain appreciation for the musician you are, to a much greater degree.

Riju Dasgupta does not exist. The writer of this piece is an illusion created by mad scientist Dr. Hex, who makes it seem like he plays bass for Albatross and Primitiv.

An Outlaw at 80

Kris Kristofferson has faced memory loss and the death of old friends, and has also found peace – just don't try to tell him what to do

‘O

BY NEIL STRAUSS

PHOTOGRAPH BY
PETER YANG

h, my god, the son of a bitch is back,” announces Lisa Kristofferson as she stands in the kitchen of her Los Flores Canyon home in Malibu. The son of a bitch, who is next to her, is more commonly known as Kris Kristofferson. He has been her husband for the past 36 years. He also happens to be one of the greatest songwriters of all time (covered by Johnny Cash, Janis Joplin, Elvis Presley and some 500 others), not to mention an iconic actor in his own right (from *A Star Is Born* to the *Blade* movies).

Three decades ago, “the son of a bitch is back” may have been the rallying cry of Kristofferson’s girlfriends or wives after he went off on a drinking or cheating bender. But today, just weeks away from Kristofferson’s 80th birthday, it means something different entirely.

It means that the rugged, fiercely independent spark of consciousness that is Kris Kristofferson, which has been fading for the past few years due to memory loss, is brightening again – to everyone’s surprise.

For years, doctors had been telling Kristofferson that his increasingly debilitating memory loss was due to either Alzheimer’s or to dementia brought on by blows to the

head from the boxing, football and rugby of his teens and early twenties. Some days, Kristofferson couldn’t even remember what he was doing from one moment to the next.

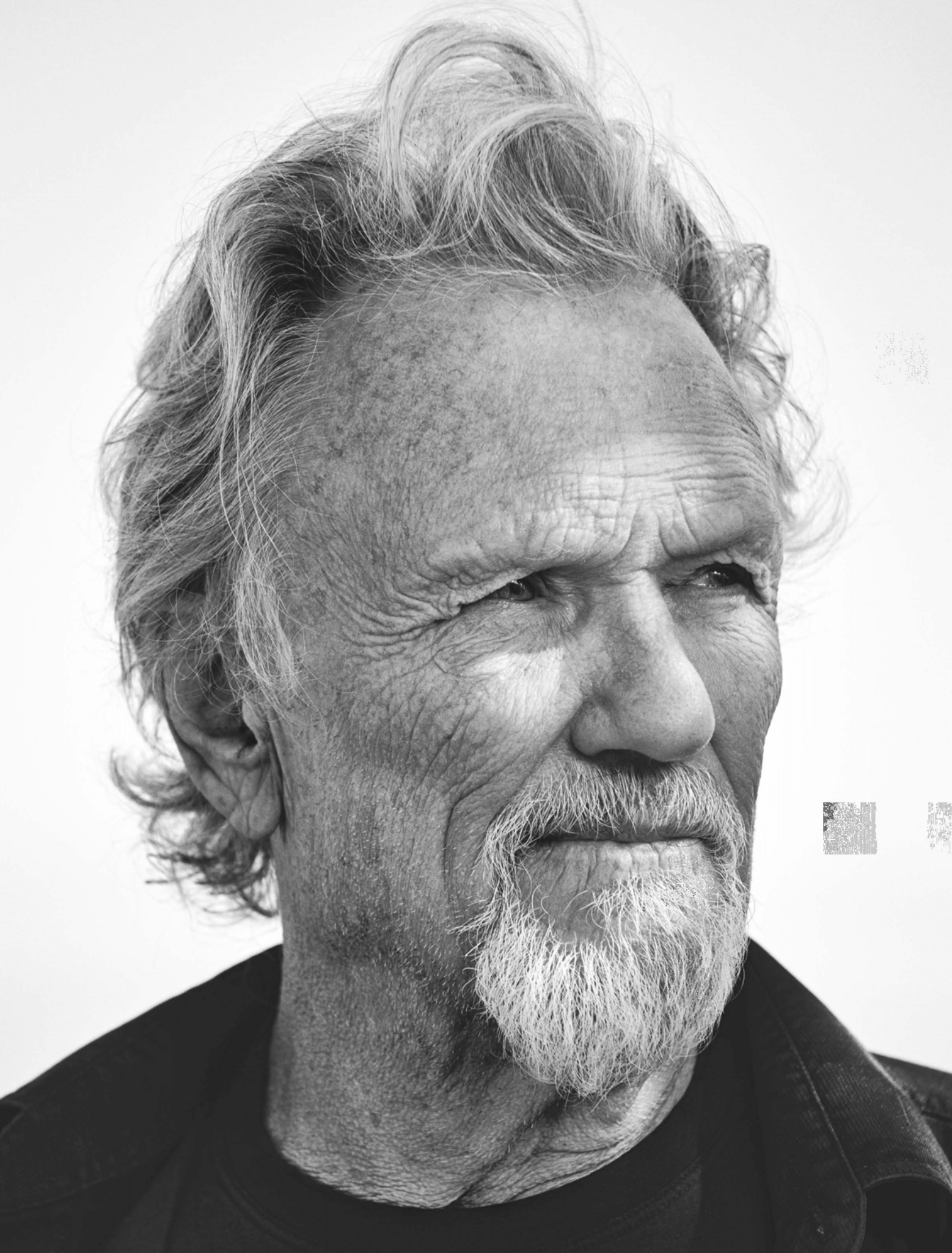
It became so bad that Kristofferson started writing a song about it. “I see an empty chair/Someone was sitting there,” it began. “I’ve got a feeling it was me/And I see a glass of wine/I’m pretty sure it’s mine.”

But then, like the chair and the wine, he forgot about the song. And it lay unfinished like many others he’s begun these past few years. In this case, his daughter Kelly completed the song, which remains unrecorded.

Then, earlier this year, a doctor decided to test Kristofferson for Lyme disease. The test came back positive. His wife believes he picked it up from a tick as he crawled around the forest floor in Vermont for six weeks while filming the movie *Disappearances*.

“He was taking all these medications for things he doesn’t have, and they all have side effects,” she says. She is wear

**FREE MAN
IN MALIBU**
Kristofferson
in May



ing one of her husband's tour merchandise shirts. After he gave up his Alzheimer's and depression pills and went through three weeks of Lyme-disease treatment, Lisa was shocked. "All of a sudden he was back," she says. There are still bad days, but "some days he's perfectly normal and it's easy to forget that he is even battling anything."

Kristofferson stands next to her, alongside the kitchen counter, a black T-shirt tight on his thin but still-solid frame, his gray goatee neatly trimmed. Behind him, there is a wall covered with pen and pencil marks, denoting the growth of his children, stepchildren, grandchildren and foster children. One would imagine that he'd be elated by his unexpected recovery.

"Yeah," he replies, unconvincingly, when asked.

So you were never scared about losing your past? Kristofferson stares straight ahead, into a sweeping ocean vista, his sky-blue eyes shining brightly under a brow that thrusts out like a rock ledge. "What good would it do?" he says with a shrug.

Seventeen years ago, Kristofferson had bypass surgery. As he was being wheeled into the operating room, the doctor told Kris and Lisa that this would be a good place to say goodbye. "I hope it's not goodbye," Lisa said.

His response: "So what if it is?"

This blunt, fatalistic streak is something Kristofferson has carried with him for most of his life like a birthmark. It's one reason directors like Martin Scorsese and Sam Peckinpah have cast him in their films.

"I really have no anxiety about controlling my own life," Kristofferson says, taking a seat at the head of a wood dining table. "Somehow I just slipped into it and it's worked. It's not up to me – or you. I feel very lucky that [life]'s lasted so long because I've done so many things that could have knocked me out of it. But somehow I just always have the feeling that He knows what He's doing. It's been good so far, and it'll probably continue to be."

He pauses. "Now as soon as I said that, of course..." He looks upward as if a lightning bolt is on its way down to strike him.

And there he goes: Just on the verge of a happy ending, Kristofferson imagines the worst will happen instead. It's a theme that runs through many of his best-known songs. Saturday nights end in Sunday hangovers ("Sunday Mornin' Coming Down"). Great relationships end, leaving lifelong regret as their legacy ("Loving Her Was Easier [Than Anything I'll Ever Do Again]," "Me and Bobby McGee"). The perfect lover who sweeps a woman off her feet is destined to abandon her, robbing her of body, soul and pride ("The Taker").

To spark his memory, Kristofferson has been going through all these old songs again. A box set of his first 11 albums, *The*

Complete Monument & Columbia Album Collection, released June 10th, rests on the counter. He has been listening to it album by album to get reacquainted with his life's work. "It just takes you back like a picture of something would," he says.

I bring him the box set. He examines the sleeves of each disc, which are designed like the original vinyl album covers. "I was also interested in seeing if they still sounded good to me," he continues. "I've been pleasantly surprised, particularly with this one." He points to his third album, *Border Lord*. "I can remember at the time being so disappointed at the reception it got."

His wife sits to his left and looks at him, beaming at his recall. "To me, the song is what matters, not necessarily the perfor-

**"IF THE WEED
HURTS MY
MEMORY, TOO
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mances," he says as he moves a napkin to examine a picture of him in his twenties, looking disheveled in his meager Nashville bedroom. "Just the words and melody – that's what moves your emotions."

The box set is just one flake in a flurry of activity happening around Kristofferson this year. There was a celebration of his life and music at the Bridgestone Arena in Nashville in March, for which he re-formed the Highwaymen with Willie Nelson, Jamey Johnson and Waylon Jennings' son Shooter. Kristofferson recently traveled to Canada to record with Gordon Lightfoot and Ronnie Hawkins. He played the lead in a new Western, *Traded*, which also released June 10th. His upcoming album, *The Cedar Creek Sessions*, includes a duet with Sheryl Crow for his first-ever recording of "The Loving Gift," a song made famous by Johnny and June Carter Cash.

He's also embarking on a special string of summer dates with Nelson: Just before Merle Haggard passed away this year on his 79th birthday, he requested that his back-

ing band, the Strangers, continue without him. So Kristofferson, his longtime friend, decided to bring the Strangers with him on the road for a few dates to perform his and Haggard's songs together.

"I'm thinking of his face when he was dying," remembers Kristofferson, who was touring with Haggard up until the end. "I had the highest respect for him. Knowing him and Willie and Waylon and Johnny Cash – that's been one of the biggest blessings in my life."

In his current state of mind, there is one period of his life that Kristofferson often returns to when reflecting on his past – a decision that, for him, changed everything. It was a combination of luck and choice. The year was 1965; the luck was that he was a captain in the Army and signed up to go to Vietnam, but was assigned a teaching position at West Point. The choice was to leave the Army instead. After reporting to West Point, he moved to Nashville to try to make it as a songwriter. As a result, this Oxford-educated Rhodes scholar soon found himself emptying wastebaskets at Columbia Recording Studios.

"I'm kind of amazed by the whole thing," he marvels. "I was on my way to a totally different life. And all of a sudden I committed my future and all my family and everything to this! It was pretty scary."

Kristofferson and Lisa say that his brother joined the Navy; his father was a two-star Air Force general; both grandfathers were in the military; even his great-grandfather was in the Swedish armed forces.

"Didn't your mother say she would rather have a gold star in the window?" Lisa asks him. Kristofferson gives a sheepish shrug. It is his way of saying, "I can't remember." It is an expression he uses a lot these days.

"When you have a family member that died during World War I, they would put a gold star in the window," she reminds him. "And your mother said she would have rather had a gold star in the window than to see what you're doing with your life."

"She said that I was an embarrassment to the family," he recalls a little later. "I've given them moments of pride, when I got my Rhodes scholarship, but she said, 'They'll never measure up to the tremendous disappointment you've always been.' Why tell your kid that?"

But when his mother sent him a scathing letter disowning him, Kristofferson experienced something he'd been seeking his whole life: freedom. It's an independence he's embraced to this day. He bucked Nashville's conventions, helping start the outlaw-country movement. More recently, he canceled a book contract for his autobiography because he didn't want to work on a deadline. His latest album includes a song called "You Don't Tell Me What to Do."



Beat the Devil

(1) In 1970. "His nickname used to be Kris Pissed-off-erson," says his wife, Lisa. (2) With Lisa, 1985. (3) With Nelson and Haggard, 2014.



"Even if someone tells him to have a good day, he'll say, 'Don't tell me what to do,'" Lisa says. "He's unmanageable. You can't manage him."

Kristofferson looks down at the table and screws up his face as she speaks.

What were you just thinking? I ask.

"I..." He pauses and purses his lips. "I think it's probably true."

In several of Kristofferson's songs, characters burn brilliantly in the present moment without a past or future, trading in "tomorrow for today" or proclaiming, "Yesterday is dead and gone/And tomorrow's out of sight." In an unexpected twist of fate, Kristofferson sometimes finds himself similarly marooned in the present moment due to his memory problems. Except unlike the characters in his songs, who usually find loneliness there, he says he feels remarkably content and well-supported.

Kelly has observed that he "forgets to get nervous," and Kristofferson notes that a couple of years ago, his anxiety just went away. "He hasn't always been happy," Lisa says. "His nickname when he was doing *Star Is Born* was Kris Pissed-off-erson." These days, one of his favorite things to do is simply mow the grass or weed-whack for hours at his primary home, in Maui.

He recently went to a reunion of the Pomona College football team, where he saw his former coach, who's now 93. And he's still in touch with his childhood nanny

Juanita, who's 93 and still calls her former charge mijo (my son).

"She probably saved my life," he says. "Because God knows my mother was an asshole. And my old man was gone most of the time."

He adds that without Juanita, he "probably would have ended up as some serial killer."

TWO WEEKS LATER, Kristofferson sits in a booth of a Malibu studio, playing the part of a ghost for an animated pilot for Fox. When he reads a line about cellphone coverage, Kelly laughs: "He doesn't know what a cellphone is. He calls them hand machines."

Afterward, the director asks Kristofferson to sign a guitar. "I'm not a very good guitar player," he tells Kristofferson.

"Neither am I," Kristofferson responds. Self-deprecation is one of Kristofferson's

most conspicuous traits. He is especially down on his singing: "I don't think I'm that good a singer," he says. "I can't think of a song that I've written that I don't like the way somebody else sings it better."

Yet even as he's pushing 80, there is no shortage of demand for his voice – whether it's films, TV dramas, cartoons, performances or albums. He has one of the most unique careers in music, which he says was inspired in part by seeing Frank Sinatra excel as both a singer and an actor.

We drive back to his house with Kelly and her boyfriend, Andrew Hagar, son of Sammy. When asked half an hour later about going to the studio today, Kristofferson works his tongue around the inside of his mouth, thinking hard. "I'll be honest with you," he finally says. "I don't remember going to the studio."

Kris and his wife have spoken about Lyme disease, head injuries and aging interfering with his memory. But there's one thing they haven't mentioned: the smoking.

"Do you think the weed hurts your memory?"

He answers quickly and defiantly: "If it does, it's too bad. I'm not quitting." He pauses and considers it further. "I'm sure that it slows me down and doesn't make me the sharpest-witted person in the room, but I'll probably be smoking till they throw dirt on me."

As we're speaking, one of Kristofferson's sons marches into the kitchen. He is known as War Pig, though he was born Jody. A heavyweight wrestling belt testifying to his prowess in the ring hangs in the living room. Each of Kris' children seems to have taken on one aspect of his career, even down to his youngest son, Blake, who majored in creative writing.

One of the few ambitions that Kristofferson never got to realize was as a literary author. In his Maui home, there are trunks full of notepads – a treasure trove of short stories, journal entries and even novels, none of it published.

"You have stories from college on," Lisa reminds him. "All through the Army, all through your time with Janis Joplin, all through your working in Wake Island, working in Alaska, working fighting fires and on the railroad. You even have stories from being a janitor in Nashville."

"I don't feel very creative anymore," Kristofferson confesses a little later. "I feel like an old boxer." He laughs. "The brain's gone, but I can still move around."

"He says that," Kelly protests, "but he leaves little pieces of songs lying around the house all the time."

Kristofferson considers this. "I may have some more creative work in me," he finally admits, then concludes on a characteristically impassive note. "But if I don't, it's not going to hurt me."

THE SLOW RISE OF INDIAN HIP HOP

ONCE AT THE MARGINS
OF THE MUSIC SCENE,
HIP-HOP IS NOW
GOING MAINSTREAM,
DRIVEN LARGELY BY
THE ANGST OF
SINGERS IN
LANGUAGES OTHER
THAN ENGLISH

BY AKHIL SOOD

Photographs by Vikas Vasudev



(Clockwise from extreme left)
Naezy, Bobkat, Divine,
Stony Psycho and Ace.
All clothes by Aeropostale;
styling by Peusha Sethia; hair
and makeup by Tenzin Kyizom,
assisted by Anuradha Raman



THE TEA-SHOP OUTSIDE KHALSA COLLEGE IN Matunga, Mumbai would, a couple of years ago, be mostly infested by a bunch of young guys narrating their lives in rhythmic verse, as crowds slowly gather around. They were called the Schizophrenics, a hip-hop crew Naezy (Naved Shaikh) started with Neykhil Nayak (N-Cube), the only other guy in his classroom who used to listen to hip-hop at the time. “We were supposed to go there to study, but we’d just bunk classes and do ciphers all day,” says Naezy. A cipher (or cypher) is a DIY, almost-impromptu gathering of artists and fans — on the streets, at corner shops, in cafés — where rappers take turns freestyling, playfully dissing each other from time to time, often accompanied by a beatboxer. “With hip-hop,” he says, “all you need is a beatboxer and the story of your life.”

When I get in touch with Prabh Deep Sagar, or Prabh, he’s at a studio in Hauz Khas Village in the capital, getting two full sleeve tattoos on his arms. On one sleeve, there’s going to be a rose, a \$100 bill, a gramophone, a microphone. The other follows a warrior theme. The overarching concept, he explains, is of a musical warrior. Prabh raps in Punjabi and English now, but his journey in hip-hop began via b-boying (breakdancing), and he recounts one of the first ciphers he went for several years ago, held in a temple auditorium, where hundreds of people showed up. He has set up a couple of road jams in the past, and he tells me about another thing he’s planning: “I’m organizing a block party in my gully, where I’ll invite everyone in my area; people will get together and talk. We’ll have a jam. It was different when I was growing up; these days, neighbours don’t even know each other.”

Prabh collaborates with Sez (Sajeel Kapoor), a producer in Delhi who has provided the music for a host of artists, including Divine and Naezy, the two young rappers from Mumbai who’ve pretty much exploded in the past couple of years. “Mere Gully Mein” (by Divine and featuring Naezy), arguably the breakthrough song from this scattered movement, also features production by him. Sez, who runs Stunnah Sez Beats (an online beat store) along with fellow producer Stunnah, tells me about Indian Coffee House, an inexpensive rooftop café in Connaught Place where people get together and discuss music, communicate, learn from each other, hone their skills. Hive, in Green Park, hosts an afterparty-esque hip-hop evening curated by Prabh and DJ Karma

each Thursday.

Today, underground hip-hop has turned into a big deal. Divine (Vivian Fernandes) has signed on to Sony Music, which has been pushing his music heavily. Brodha V was also, until last year, signed with the same label. Naezy is being managed by OML. Guys like Sikander Kahlon in Punjab, MC Kash from Kashmir, Borkung Hrangkhaw

“Mera gig tha, merko hi entry rok diya. Stag nahi chalega (I wasn’t allowed to enter my own gig because I was a single guy!)”- Prabh

(BK) from Tripura, they’re all doing their own thing. Movements are sprouting across the country, with rappers using local and regional languages to connect with audiences (Tamil, Gujarati, Marathi, Punjabi, Hindi), lending a sense of identity to a sound that has been adopted — and adapted — from the west.

Frequent gigs at popular pubs are the norm, with artists I spoke to citing the Humming Tree in Bangalore as a particularly welcoming venue, while High Spirits (Pune) is also spoken of fondly. It’s different from just a couple of years ago, where venues were opposed to vernacular rap because they associated it instantly with the more mainstream strains of commercial hip-hop

popularised by the likes of Honey Singh and Badshah. In fact, Prabh recalls a gig where he was supposed to perform, but was denied entry at the gate. “*Mera gig tha, merko hi entry rok diya. Stag nahi chalega* [they weren’t letting me enter my own gig because I was a single guy!],” he laughs.

It’s changed now. Divine received heavy circulation on the BBC Asian Network, landing him a spot at a gig in London, the Asian Network Live. Naezy contributed a song for the T20 cricket world cup held this year, and another, “Tragedy Mein Comedy,” for All India Bakchod. Most major festivals will have rappers headlining a stage or two. Antisocial in Mumbai hosted a grand evening called Hip Hop Homeland a few months ago as well, a culmination of a series of short films documenting the rise of hip-hop in India made by the online youth portal 101India. The gig was packed to capacity, featuring a range of artists including Mumbai’s Finest and Swadesi, a couple of popular crews. Further, there were literally hundreds of kids who’d gathered there that day, blocking the road outside the venue. They were denied entry because they were too young to buy a beer, and yet they refused to leave, just sort of hanging around until they were chased away by cops. The press has shown interest, both Indian and international. Music videos have made their way to TV sets. There’s also a film that Zoya Akhtar is working on, inspired by the stories of Divine and Naezy (although, given past dalliances between Bollywood and the underground, it’s best to reserve judgement until later).

All these occurrences, though, are merely happy consequences. In truth, the underground hip-hop movement in the country has been built from the ground up by the artists themselves. Without getting too emphatic about it, the attention and praise being heaped is a natural outcome of the thought and hard work that has gone into establishing it.

According to Divine and several others, the Internet has been instrumental, and anyone with a smartphone and a 3G connection can now hear the music. The early days of this movement started off as a truly DIY thing: in the case of Naezy, his first song, “Aafat,” was put together with the help of his crew; he even made the video on his own, using an iPad. Being notorious in his area — Kurla, Mumbai-70, which he references often — being the guy who was always up to no good, helped. The 100 or so people who knew about the antics of Naved Shaikh checked it out and began talking about it. Those guys would then go to other ‘hoods and share the song with their extended friends circle, eventually spawning a legitimate fan following through word of mouth and internet hits. Divine’s first video was shot on a cell phone as well.



Ace

ABHISHEK DHUSIA,
28, CLAIMS HIS
COLLECTIVE MUMBAI'S
FINEST ORGANIZED
THE FIRST RAP BATTLE
IN MUMBAI. THEY
ALSO LAY CLAIM AS
THE CITY'S FIRST RAP
CREW, A POSITION
SEALED WITH THE
RELEASE OF THEIR
DEBUT ALBUM
'MUMBAI
TILL I DIE'.

This wave of homegrown hip-hop we see now is about three or four years old, but the form has been around for far longer. Bob Omulo — MC Bobkat at Bombay Bassment — has been a vocal champion of the scene (having also contributed columns for this publication). Originally from Kenya, Omulo has been part of underground hip-hop in India for over a decade, and speaks of the massive impact the b-boys had well before the breakout acts of today. “It’s a culture, and the b-boys exemplify it the most. They form crews, and they’re like a family,” says Omulo. “They look out for each other.” The first wave, in the mid-2000s or so, included a lot of people rapping in English: “That stage was a spurt of interest, and now you have people who’ve grown up with the music. They’re not talking about hanging out with ‘bitches in the club’ or rolling out in cars. It’s stuff people can relate to. The homegrown acts have adapted hip-hop to vernacular, regional languages. This is what’s necessary, in my opinion, for hip-hop to really take root in any society. All the things that are here right now... I attribute that to the kids who’ve been ciphers and rapping for years for absolutely nothing except the love of it.”

Mumbai’s Ace (Abhishek Dhusia), a veteran of the scene at the age of 28, tells me about starting Mumbai’s Finest with AP and Top Dawg back in 2006. The first song they wrote was “Shake It,” where they picked up a headphone mic to record, mined Soundclick.com for a catchy beat to set the words over, and put it up. “That song became a Bluetooth viral thing. We’d go eat *bhurji pao* at 3a.m. near Andheri Station and people would be bumping that shit. We were like, ‘Oh, that’s my song,’ and they wouldn’t believe us,” he laughs.

Divine used to be a part of Mumbai’s Finest as well, and the crew functions as a large collective of rappers, video DJs, b-girls and b-boys, skateboarders, beatboxers, football freestylers. “We were always around, a lot of brothers like us,” says Ace with unmistakable pride, “but people are only discovering us right now. Hip-hop is about unity, about brotherhood and loyalty.” He’s in the process of setting up Worth Itt, a startup digital platform and label through which he wants to help push young artists with potential, to guide them and provide them with resources. It’s an ambition Prabh shares, with plans of running a dedicated hip-hop label at some point.

It stretches beyond the music — contextually niche as it may still be, hip-hop, fundamentally, functions as a cultural revolution of sorts (as an aside, gigs will often feature chants of “*Inquilaab Zindabaad*” [Long Live The Revolution]). The b-boying, the graffiti, the underground ciphers, the beatboxing and spitting rhymes, the slang, the look — all

the assorted frills — bring about a sense of community. As Naezy says: “Sure, a little bit of ‘swag’ comes into it — *topi tedhi hoti hai* [the cap is always tilted sideways], you walk a certain way. But hip-hop becomes a lifestyle, a state of mind.”

An abstract notion of authenticity becomes intrinsically tied up with what hip-hop means. It’s where the ‘Indianness’ is paramount. The aesthetics of the term are a little suspect, but ‘desi hip-hop’ then becomes a legitimate tag. The sonic quality is borrowed largely from American hip-hop — Omulo ascribes that to a natural process of creative evolution — but the lyrical content is inherent to the Indian experience. Mainstream hip-hop, probably closer to pop music drawing from elements of rap, is rejected in this space because of its derivative nature. The emphasis there, in a nutshell, is on glorifying materialism — the sex, drugs, the excesses of fame and money —

The defining characteristic of underground hip-hop seems to be the focus on actual, lived experiences

an approach often dismissed as dishonest or lacking integrity.

Divine doesn’t quite agree with the thought though. “I don’t get this definition of ‘real’.” It’s different for everyone. The commercial rappers talk about cars or money or women because they see it every day; it’s around them. What else will they talk about? You have to be true to yourself in such a situation.” He accepts that, who knows, maybe if he were in the same situation, similar content would make its way into his music too.

That said, Divine is clear that, with his own music at least, he wants to preserve the idea of spreading a social message. It’s something he’s pushing forth in the new music he’s working on as well. “It’s very important — we have to give back, we have to speak the truth. I try to say things I feel should be said, what I’ve seen, what’s going on.” The music functions as a way to help kids feel comfortable in their own skin: “We are not ashamed of being ourselves.” Talking about the words and their influence, especially in Mumbai, he says: “A hawker, an office guy, a rickshaw-wallah, a guy working in the stock market — they’ll all understand what we’re saying.”

The defining characteristic of underground hip-hop seems to be the focus on actual, lived experiences, as a way to reach out and effect

meaningful change. On things that might matter on a socio-political level. Prabh lives in Tilak Nagar, in west Delhi, and a lot of the lyrical material he tackles is about the things affecting him, and those around. He recently lost a childhood friend to a drug overdose, the eighth such incident he can recall in the past year. So he’s writing about these issues affecting his area, trying to motivate people.

Naezy uses a carefully constructed fusion of Hindi, Urdu, and Bambaiya slang in his verses — even in conversation, he’s articulate, thoughtful, and rat-a-tat, shifting from a throwaway “*Ek number, banta!*” to poetic Urdu monologs effortlessly — to connect with listeners who can relate to his words. Corruption, bribery, police brutality, moral decay in forgotten neighbourhoods: these are all themes covered in the music. Naezy, specifically, has had frequent run-ins with the authorities — gang-related, drug-related, petty crimes — so the subject matter is often deeply personalized. “It’s helping break class barriers,” he says, discussing the impact of the words in this movement, drawing a direct parallel to the US.

When he was in the eleventh grade, there was one fateful ride on a Mumbai local that he took with a friend. The friend, as it turns out, had been following a girl around, and the duo were arrested as soon as they reached the station. “*Mere dost kaand karein, mujhe kya pata?* (How can I know what shit my friends are up to?)” is a line from a new song he’s working on. They were beaten up a little, eventually finding

themselves at a police *chowki* in Mulund, some 30–40 km from where he lives. His friend’s father, an influential man, paid the requisite fine and got his son out, but there was no one that Naezy could call, given that his father was working in Dubai at the time. It was a watershed moment for him, realizing that he was heading down an unpleasant path. Eventually, he sought a distant uncle to help out, but he remembers how the behavior of the policemen changed considerably once they looked at his ID card and saw his name, even though he wasn’t the prime culprit in this situation, but more an accomplice (unwitting or otherwise). The discrimination, for Naved Shaikh, was first-hand, and it makes its way into his words too — an outlet for the anger he has. The experiences of the young urban Indian woman are bound to be radically different from that of the male rapper, which in turn affects the musical direction that rappers such as MC Kaur (Manmeet Kaur) and Dee MC (Deepta Unnikrishnan) take. The spirit remains the same — a thread of rebellion and self-expression giving life to the music — but the words reflect a different perspective. MC Kaur has an album called *Hip Hop Bahu*. “Post Wedding Blues” is about her life after getting married — the expectations one faces and the fear of living up to them.



Naezy

THE 20-YEAR-OLD
SC. GRADUATE SPITS
RHYMES THAT CHRON-
ICLE THE POVERTY,
HUSTLE AND RESIL-
IENCE OF BOMBAY
SATTAR [THE POST-
CODE OF HIS GHETTO-
ESQUE RESIDENCE,
KURLA].

On “Art Saviours,” which places a shuddering beat atop Indian-sounding samples, she raps: “But don’t buy the crap they serve on TV/ That show of reality/ That *saas-bahu-biwi*, get off that!/ Fabricated news on a repeat, that’s wack!” Dee MC again explores the challenges and obstacles of gender inequality, from independence to the difficulty of traversing hip-hop in India. “Don’t you know that *deeva* is the female version of the hustler”, she says in “*Deeva*”, before moving on to: “Only queen in the scene to give you a checkmate”, alluding, perhaps, to the suspicions that Indian rap is still a bit of a boys’ club.

There’s a popular market in Greater Kailash – 1 in Delhi called the M-Block market. It’s a refuge of the privileged, frequented by people who live nearby, where real estate has flourished — let’s say Rs. 40 crore for an average-sized plot. The market goes through periodic overhauls every five to 10 years. Right now, it’s a mix of expensive boutiques and shops, some hippy-dippy urban wellness and healthy living shops, a few ‘funky-trendy-hip-cool’ new-age clothes stores, coffee shop chains, and a clutch of bars and restaurants. And Prince Paan Shop, a bona fide Delhi institution. The people walking around are advertisements for luxury brands, as also a

fleeting glimpse of what one does when we have more money than sense.

In this market, I meet Uday Kapur, a journalist who’s been writing extensively about the hip hop movement in India. Kapur previously worked at OML as a writer before moving on to manage Naezy. These days, he occasionally performs live with Naezy (besides being a DJ himself), triggering his backing tracks and, on occasion, “hying him”, i.e. filling up any empty spots in the rap as Naezy — who has a fairly frantic, rapidfire delivery on stage — takes a fraction of a second to catch his breath.

Our primary goal at the time is to talk about hip hop in India. Soon, though, it quickly turns into finding a bar cheap enough to accommodate our big hearts and small wallets. We settle on My Bar, originally a small pub in the rather less gentrified locales of Paharganj, and now a popular city-wide franchise of sorts. A beer there costs a pitiful Rs. 120.

Kapur provides me with a comprehensive background of hip-hop: the Punjabi scene; the kind of stuff that’s happening in Delhi; Mumbai’s recent over-documented eruption; rapping in the Northeast, and the absence of venues there; the scene in Bengaluru, Hyderabad, and Chennai, and the role the regional film industry plays. Eventually, we reach the abstract, the hypothetical, the aca-

demic and the speculative. We speak about authenticity.

Most often, artists here bring about a mix of autobiographical narration and an insistence on tackling the real-life struggles of youth around, which resonates across different audiences. Old school rappers in the US have devoted considerable stage time to their experience on the streets, to gang violence and drugs and murder. That template has been adapted, tailored to an Indian context for the sake of honesty and realism, as Indian rappers sing about their life on the streets, in the gullies, on matters of oppression and discrimination.

It’s an Indian idiom being applied to a concept that already existed — the artists are adding a new layer, creating a new kind of vocabulary within the existing aesthetic of the form. They want to say the things they believe in, and do it in a way that rings true, instead of merely aping their heroes. Ace says: “*Lafda hoyega*, then you won’t say, ‘F**k you, mother**ker’. You’ll say, ‘*Teri maa ki ch**t*’. So why not do this shit in your regional tongue?”

It’s a delicate subject — the matter of originality and authenticity, of placing your own imprint on to a form — that’s become much discussed. Rishu Singh, Mumbai-based promoter and founder of events agency Ennui.Bomb, has been organizing a

Bobkat

SINCE HE SHIFTED FROM KENYA TO INDIA OVER 15 YEARS AGO, 30-SOMETHING BOB OMULO HAS CO-FOUNDED HIP-HOP PODCAST SHOW VOICE OF THA PEOPLE, STOOD IN AS EMCEE FOR A NUMBER OF GIGS AND MOST NOTABLY, PERFORMS WITH MUMBAI-BASED REGGAE/HIP HOP GROUP BOMBAY BASSMENT.



Divine

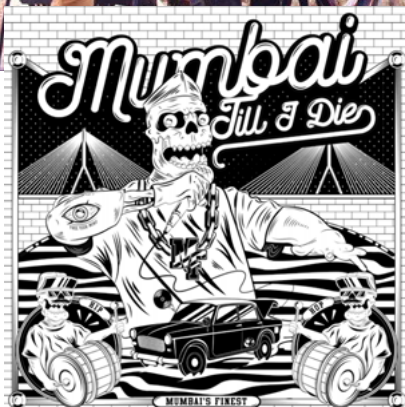
VIVIAN FERNANDES, 25, HAS ALREADY TOURED ACROSS LONDON AND DUBAI, SIGNED TO SONY MUSIC INDIA, RELEASED A FORMIDABLE NEW SINGLE "JUNGLI SHER" AND WORKED WITH BASS MUSIC KING NUCLEYA, ALL WITHIN A YEAR.



Stony Psycho

TONY SEBASTIAN, 24, AND HIS MULTILINGUAL CREW DOPE-ADELICZ CAMPAIGNS FOR MARIJUANA LEGALIZATION, ANTI-CORRUPTION AND — GOING BY THEIR VIRAL SINGLE “AAI SHAPATH ME NAVH-TO” — POLICE INJUSTICE.





(1) Bob Omulo (extreme right) with his band Bombay Bassment; (2) Naezy (left) and Divine in the video of "Meri Gully Mein"; (3) Stony Psycho (centre) with his group Dopeadelicz; (4) The artwork of Mumbai's Finest's new album 'Mumbai Till I Die'



regular series of gigs called Hip-Hop Bomb Thursdays since early 2015, showcasing young hip-hop acts to pub-going audiences in Mumbai. While his prior work has been mostly by way of independent rock 'n' roll, Singh admits a deep fascination for the culture of hip-hop. He has an interesting analogy about the insistence for social messages within the music, and the DIY spirit that runs through it: "The whole vibe is very 'punk rock', in its own way. You're trying to do things differently, by your own standards, your own ethics. These boys were just doing it on their own; it was all very 'anti', very in-your-face; *kya bolta, bantai*. I could identify with it."

The theme of local pride is ever-present. It's a kind of acknowledgement of where you come from — the streets, the 'hood, the gully, the ghetto, the *ilaka*, call it what you will — and also a sincere attempt at capturing a snapshot of that life. Dissecting Divine's lyrical flair on "Jungli Sher," Kapur points to the third line of the song — "*Mere daal mein nahi tha tadka*." He says, "It can't get more Indian than that, and by using a common, simple food item such as dal which cuts across classes, Divine manages to paint a picture of where he's from and what kind of life he's had. It's a lyric that can only work in a South Asian context, and that's something you'll find is a common characteristic across Indian hip-hop."

Ace emphasizes the competitive nature of hip-hop: the incessant need to be at the very top of your game, dissing other rappers, improving your own skills, trying to outdo

each other. This competition becomes as essential as that sense of loyalty, but that's where the purity of intentions come into it. Personal growth is an aspiration, which leads to positive one-upmanship. Hard work, he feels, can lead to that skill level, but that it's ultimately about being relevant. "Anyone can be on top," says Ace. "Survival is more important. How every time you're down, you learn and wait to come back up, never giving up. If you have that conviction, you're a rebel, and, no matter what the world says, you'll always be one."

A self-awareness runs deep into the thought process of the artists. You hear "Mere Gully Mein" and you understand that Divine is attempting to bridge some kind of a gap between his experience, and the resentment of countless others like him. There's research, dedication, cultivation of skill, inborn talent, all topped off with a healthy sprinkling of brutal honesty and self-expression — and, of course, humor. Naezy waited some six months before releasing "Aafat," spending time to study the scene and figure out a plan. He deliberated over the technical aspects of rapping and the intersection between the origins of the form and the context of Indian culture. How he added Bambaiya slang, multiple syllable rhymes, catchy beats, a rhythmic flow and incorporated new trends in hip-hop.

Underground hip-hop — desi hip-hop — is on this radical upswing right now. Leaving aside the social relevance of the music, there's seemingly a high level of quality that exists, although there's some disagreement to that aspect when it comes to the new crop

finding an original voice. That's a creative concern the artists have, coupled with the constant rebellion against the flippancy of mainstream hip-hop. Beyond that, it merely boils down to logistical concerns. Rishu Singh tells me how the obstacles mirror the problems the independent rock community faced at its onset: "The kids who come for a gig don't have enough money to buy a beer for Rs. 400. It makes it unfeasible for a venue to host hip-hop gigs. But that'll change as the kids who come today, who're in college right now, grow up and start earning." Sez points to the importance of marketing the music. Underground hip-hop will get 1,000 plays, even 10,000 plays, maybe even more. But that's nothing compared to a video on YouTube of a song by, say, Badshah, which will have some 50 million hits. "People don't understand the value of investment in their own art right now, which is very important." Omulo speaks of an absence of large-scale outlets for vernacular rappers, who're forced to compete against the might of Bollywood and only have one TV channel, Pepsi MTV Indies, that'll air their videos.

But, from the outside, hip-hop seems to be looking forward, not back. There's grand ambition all around, from setting up labels to performing all over the world to making it to Bollywood. Naezy says: "An underground fan base is great, but why should I limit it to that? It's important to reach out to more people to spread the message. Who knows, maybe it'll just go *thapp* in a couple of years. But once you make it to the mainstream, *kuch toh bhala hoga. Samaaj mein kuch toh badlaav laana hai*."

WHEN RAP REVOLTS

IN A STATE CAUGHT IN TUMULTUOUS TIMES, YOUNG PUNJABI RAPPERS ARE REVOLTING AGAINST THE HEDONISM GLORIFIED BY A PREVIOUS GENERATION

BY ISHA SINGH SAWHNEY

IN 'UDTA PUNJAB', TOMMY, THE PUNJABI SINGER cursed with puppy dog exuberance, has one claim to fame, "Asian Underground number three *maara hai maine* [I've ranked three on the Asian Underground chart]." The pop star's hat tip to his across-the-seas popularity is proof of his on-screen legitimacy, which is admittedly difficult to buy into when you first hear his juvenile "Coke Cock" tirade.

An earnest anti-drug propaganda movie set in the bowels of Punjab's horrific drug war, *Udta Punjab* flips the norm of rappers becoming movie stars to movie stars playing rappers. Tommy Singh, the rich face of Punjab's drug abuse is a successful rapper whose on-stage, high-energy career rests seemingly on his next line of cocaine, and singing about cocaine, or *chitta*, the street name for heroin.

For years now, contemporary Punjabi singers and rappers have been singing about drugs, fast cars and hot girls. A study by IIM, Ahmedabad showed that 60 percent of the 200 youth interviewed across universities in Punjab listen to Punjabi music that reference drugs, violence and demean women. Punjab's relationship with rap isn't new. From the days of Jay Z remixing Panjabi MC's "Mundian To Bach Ke" (2003) and the UK-based production house Tru Skool producing Diljit Dosanjh's 2012 album *Back to Basics*, Punjabi music shares beats, shimmies and even subject matter with hip-hop. Bhangra's shared soul

with old-school NY hip-hop means similar tempos, rhyming, hip-hop's emcees' similarity to Punjabi music's *boliyan*, and even bhangra dance and b-boying sharing much in common.

But in the last half-a-decade, a new crop of rappers riding the Yo Yo Honey Singh wave, is at the same time distancing themselves from everything associated with that music – the drugs, satanic worship, crashing fast cars and objectifying women – or at least, there's an earnest effort to do so. Accusations that Singh's brand of music is too commercial and often even stolen from his former crew members fly fast and furious. Two former members of Singh's crew Mafia Mundeer, Raaftar and Badshah, have even gone public with their dislike of Singh, and vice versa, including a series of ongoing rap battles dissing each other.

But before all this was the more kosher "Thanda Thanda Pani." When rap hit Indian TV with Baba Sehgal's remake of Vanilla Ice's "Ice Ice Baby," it caught the imagination of millions tuned into [popular music show on national TV] *Chitrahaar*. Since breaking away from Singh, Dilin Nair, known by his stage name Raftaar, has seen unprecedented success in the last few years. The Delhi-based artist started rapping along to Eminem and Linkin Park, until he realized simply rhyming wasn't rapping. "Sadly, in India rap started on a comic note – "Thanda Thanda Pani," *Patel Scope* by [Indi-pop singer] Devang Patel,

parodies of songs in Bollywood. People thought it was a funny. With their cross earrings and bikes, we soon realized they weren't singing, but were just talking! Until Bohemia and Hard Kaur came along," explains Raftaar.

'Real' rappers will tell you it was Bohemia who started the desi hip-hop 'revolution'. The sulky-faced California-based rapper grew up in Compton and became famous in 2002 when his debut album *Vich Pardesan De* went straight to the top of the BBC Radio UK charts. For anyone who wants to rap serious, he is god. And today his endorsements mean the world. For the first time in desi hip-hop's history, Bohemia is now working with underground artists, to produce a mixtape with his production house Kali Denali Music. The album includes rappers from South Asia, like Pardhaan, a Hindi/Haryanvi rapper from Karnal and Young Desi, an underground artist from Lahore.

Today, a quick ride through Google and YouTube confirms that almost no Punjabi song is complete without a rapper's contribution. Yet, 28-year-old Mohali-based rapper Navdeep Singh aka Nottotune rues songs may have Punjabi rap, but rappers rarely get their due. "Rappers are used as fillers, and they don't even do that properly. A singer and rapper are equal, even though they aren't similar in their art."

However ever since Pepsi MTV Indies came along, artists say their exposure has increased. When they started out, Singh and his younger brother Lucky (Harsimran Jit Singh), would 'drop' albums from their bedrooms, shoot videos on DSLRs, upload them on YouTube, and wait for views and likes.

"Earlier, our reach was only in the North," says Nottotune, adding, "Now our

Raftaar

CHANDIGARH-BORN
RAPPER DILIN NAIR,
27, STARTED OUT
PERFORMED ALONG-
SIDE YO YO HONEY
SINGH AS PART OF
MAFIA MUNDEER.
AFTER THE HIP-HOP
GROUP SPLIT UP,
RAFTAAR SIGNED ON
THREE RECORDS.



Yo Yo Honey Singh

BEFORE HE WAS
RAKING IN RS. 60
LAKH A TRACK,
PUNJAB-BORN
HIRDESH SINGH, 33,
STARTED OUT AS AN
INDEPENDENT
SESSIONS AND
RECORDING ARTIST
IN MUMBAI.



Singh in a still from his music video 'Blue Eyes'; (below) Pardhaan

fan base has increased to Bengaluru and even Chennai. We can say we have been on TV!" As opposed to channels like Tashan and PTC that charge artists about 1 to 1.5 lakh to air their songs for a week, Pepsi MTV Indies only asks for a censor certificate to air videos. Some artists don't even need TV for exposure, what with the fast-growing popularity of on-demand media from digital media outlets like YouTube (that send artists money every few months) and apps like Hotstar. People are consuming more and more of their music online, making recognition by mainstream channels almost irrelevant.

"Ever since we have gone online independently, we are doing pretty well!" says Nottotune. Their video "Shaukeen Baliye," after airing on Pepsi MTV Indies, hit 72,759 views in under six months, while other videos barely broke past 1, 500 in a few years. These numbers don't compare when pitted against the success of Raftaar's "Instagram Love," watched 5,294,760 times since it was uploaded in June. That's when the underground scene crosses over into mainstream – when Bollywood notices you.

Some like SirD, Ankit Chahal have taken the underground scene into their own hands. "What I have in my mind for Indian hip-hop can't be started with any label here. I have been trying to encourage the scene for years, and so finally I along with a few partners have started a new label



which is called Dirt Records." The label will focus on prompting the new, young talent easily available in India, and have already started recording, and shot what they call "high-end videos".

However, what rappers don't lack is content, and much of it, in the words of Nottotune is "*bandukein, chitta or ladki chedna* [guns, drugs or pursuing women." In 2013, while researching a piece on contemporary music in Punjab, Singh told this author that he earnestly believed "rap was poetry". Raftaar says rappers should really only rap about their real lives, not those they see on TV.

One of the few underground voices making a mark with their music, Singh's crew

KRU172's has to their name "Chandigarh Mera Shehar," a song about the city they love. The track even visits parts of the city that aren't developed, where Singh grew up and where drug peddlers and shady deals abound. "We wanted to show people the Chandigarh that other people are afraid of showing." Their other song "Shaukeen Baliye" is about loving the good life without "daru, drugs or *chedoing girls* [alcohol, drugs and girls]". He says, "[It's a happy bhangra song about the bump in your ride while on your *gedi* [drive]. Second-grade lyrics *nahi hone chahiye* [lyrics shouldn't be second-grade]. We didn't want anything demeaning girls; we aren't going to disrespect anyone."

At 27, Raftaar has seen unprecedented success in Bollywood, but he says it's his much stronger underground fan base that makes him come back to his music, and is really the reason he exists. With songs on climate change, Raftaar seems wise beyond his years. He tells me how his underground fans even have tattoos of his name, "It's through my underground songs that I explain my story. I'd be amazed if anyone has a Yo Yo Honey Singh tattoo," he ribs playfully. "He made people dance, but he is not an influence. But now the culture is changing." Despite his Bollywood-given popularity, even his film songs are chosen responsibly. While, "Toh Dishoom," a track from the Akshay Kumar-starrer *Dishoom*

may have a catchy club beat, it's not a party track, says Raftaar. "Allah Vey" meanwhile is about brotherhood across borders.

Chandigarh-based Chahal, who was last seen recording an album of club tracks for an album that was to be a "mix of club, house and dubstep" — songs about the motherland, break-ups, partying, fast cars and gangstas — tells me his latest rap is more about the "universal aspects of hip-hop and music." Chahal's new avatar is more meta. "My content is about basic things that go around but nobody talks about. I feel connected to every emotion that I have, whether it's anger towards what's going on around me or love for the beautiful world I see. I am venting it all out through my songs. For me that is music."

In the midst of all the noise made by dance anthems, there is much introspection. Artists are rapping about brotherhood, glasses of chai and even about rappers who don't rap in English. Kahlon, another Chandigarh based rapper, who has just been signed on by the Canada-based label giant Munj Musik raps, "*Punjabi hoke angreji vichh karde ho rap kyun/ Tāhde varge breadan layi haiga ni eh jam yo/ Mein haiga ni par kha lenda mein pig kaka/ Mein underground sare karan menu dig kaka/ Paadu tenu box ch zara ja tu ve tick kaka/ RIP eh rappera nu*

eh gaana phaarū RIP kaka. (Being Punjabi, why do you rap in English/This jam is not for breads like you/I'm not one, but I do eat pig/Everyone in the underground digs me/I'll put you in a box, wait for a while/ RIP to rappers, this song is going to rip them)." And where SirD's "Aukaat" is about how artists are affected by piracy, Raftaar's first solo earlier this year is about falling in love on Instagram where its "filters" are an allegory for life.

Kahlon's songs resonate with the struggles young boys and girls feel growing up in Punjab obsessed with quick money

Like Raftaar's poetry on women empowerment, Badshah too made it a point to tell me that he had written a song for women. All in a clear move to distance from Honey Singh's controversial song glorifying rape. Where many rappers go wrong is in not realizing that "rap was about real

life," not, as Nair says, about "Bohemia's life and struggles growing up on the streets of America."

"When Bohemia came onto the scene, he rapped about drugs, guns, jails and enemies. That doesn't happen here. His subjects are not the same as ours. We don't have the same pain. My dad was a janitor. My mom was a typist. She sacrificed so much for me! Those were my hardships," says Raftaar, adding that it's rappers like Kahlon and Pardhaan who aren't talking drugs and guns. "Pardhaan is from the *doodh-dahi* culture [dairy-loving regional community], and he talks about breaking bones and beating people up. But he is from Haryana! That's what they do there!"

In keeping with the *Udta Punjab* subject, Kahlon responds to Punjab's war on drugs with an amateurish video superimposed on a drug documentary, where he talks about the terror drugs have inflicted on the state. His songs resonate with the struggles the youth feel growing up in a Punjab obsessed with quick money, a fight for swag and a yearning for the motherland they're all so eager to leave behind. Raftaar feels that's where rap has gone wrong in India. "People started liking the same songs about girls and bars. People wanted to follow that life. But you don't know what's going on behind the scene!"



BAD RAP
Shahid Kapur
plays the drug
addict rapper
Tommy Singh in
'Udta Punjab'



A photograph of Keith Urban playing a Fender Telecaster guitar. He is in a dimly lit room, likely a restaurant, with a large American flag visible in the background through a window with horizontal blinds. The lighting is warm and focused on the musician and his instrument.

Keith Urban's Hard Road

His rise to fame, paved by talent, looks and drive, has led the country megastar to the darkest of places

By Erik Hedegaard

IN KEITH URBAN'S WORLD, IT HAD BEEN GOING SO WELL FOR so long that something was bound to happen, and it happened today, in Nashville, at his mansion-size home, while he was cutting his toenails. He'd woken up at 6:00, slid off his bed to the floor to say his morning prayers, which he's done daily since getting sober 10 years ago, dressed and fed the kids (Eggo waffles for Faith Margaret, 5; Raisin Bran for Sunday Rose, 7), bundled them into the family Audi, dropped them off at school, returned home, worked out,

PHOTOGRAPH BY DAVID McCLISTER

At Dino's
Restaurant in
East Nashville
in May

toweled off, got the clippers and bent down. This is where everything went kablooey. He was within minutes of heading out the door to the Bridgestone Arena downtown, where he and his band were practicing, getting ready for his upcoming world tour to showcase songs from *Ripcord*, his eighth true solo album since arriving in the U.S. nearly 20 years ago. Half country, half something else entirely, heavy on the electro-pop and drum loops, light on the twang, riddled through with the charged-up surreal pluckings of his beloved ganjo (a.k.a. a six-string banjo), its first single, "John Cougar, John Deere, John 3:16," was already Number One on the country charts, bringing his total Top 10 hit count since his first solo release in 1999 to a record-setting 35. At the age of 48, he was on a roll. But then, toenail clippers still in hand, he straightened up and a sudden back spasm hit him so hard he doubled over and shouted, "Oh, motherfucker!"

It wasn't anything that ice, a massage and a brace couldn't patch up; nonetheless, over the next few hours, certain changes had to be made: a lunch date canceled, an upcoming pre-event ride in Mario Andretti's two-seater Indy car at the Indianapolis 500 scotched. "I feel pummeled," Urban says when he finally makes it to the arena, a brace forcing him to stand ramrod-straight. It could have been worse, of course, and certainly much worse has happened to Urban, including past problems with drugs and alcohol that nearly wrecked his marriage to actress Nicole Kidman, in 2006, when it was just four months old. In the main, however, Urban thinks that many of his fans believe he's had an easy go of it, not so much the hardcore country ones but the vast number of newer ones who tune in because of his marriage and his four-year stint as the most affable of *American Idol* judges, signifying to them a happy cakewalk from Australia to Nashville.

"They know me now as being married to Nic," he says. "They've seen me on TV. And they just sort of think, 'He's the luckiest guy in the world.'" Which it's hard not to. Movie premieres with Kidman, four Grammys, 10 Country Music Awards, a Golden Globe nomination, a stable of cars that includes a Bugatti with paddle shifters. And yet, he says, "There's just so much shit underneath all that that you didn't see." In truth, the hard times were harder than almost anyone except his wife knows, and more desperate, and more frightening, up to the point of should-I-live-or-should-I-die, with him favoring the latter. "No, man," he says later on, "I didn't just walk into this gig." And then he proceeds to open up a little bit about some of the stuff that happened.

ONE OF THE THINGS YOU NOTICE upon first encountering Urban is how terrific he smells. Whatever he's wearing, it radiates off him like a bloom of musk, jasmine and tobacco, pepper and unmediated amber, thickly, almost a fog. It's a pretty dramatic, mind-expanding cocktail and tends to swamp you with good will toward its wearer before he even utters a word. It's some kind of chemistry thing that's compounded by the dimples in his cheeks, the highlighted, center-parted curtain of boyish hair, the muscles plumping the sleeves of his T-shirt, the novelty (a word he hates, by the way) of his Australian accent, etc., etc. All of it adds up to make him a talk-show favorite, especially with Ellen DeGeneres, who always appears comically ready to switch sides for him, and once went so far as to let her hands and lips roam over his entire body, even dangerously low,

"They see me on TV and just think, 'He's the luckiest guy in the world.' But there's just so much shit underneath that they didn't see."

for a phony-baloney commercial meant to mock-hawk his signature cologne, Phoenix, which is not, by the way, what he's wearing today.

And then there's his music. In Nashville, he's about as progressive as they come. His self-titled first album toed the country line fairly well and led to his first Number One single in the U.S., the (perhaps) panderingly titled "But for the Grace of God." Ever since then, however, he's steadily expanded not only his own boundaries but also the genre's, bringing to bear influences ranging from Dire Straits to Fleetwood Mac to Bruce Springsteen to Meat Loaf, rocking pretty hard throughout. On *Ripcord*, he hired disco don Nile Rodgers to produce the glitter-ball-ready "Sun Don't Let Me Down" and brought in rapper Pitbull for a midtune musical break. If it's out there, he's got his eyes on it. Lyrically, he's maybe not so far-ranging, his themes revolving around country's traditional themes, more or less: girls, loss of girls, drinking alone and pick-em-ups, with songs like "You Look Good in My Shirt," "Tonight I Wanna Cry" and "Boy Gets a Truck." Conversely, his guitar skills are nothing short of freaky.

Actually, he's kind of gearhead-obsessed with guitars and can talk about them endlessly and emotionally, especially when it comes to the sorrow he felt when the great Nashville flood of 2010 rolled over his collection of axes stored in a local rehearsal space, rendering them a sorry, soggy mess. Among the presumed lost was his treasured 1988 Fender Telecaster, the 40th-anniversary edition, which he'd named Clarence, after the guardian angel in the sentimental Jimmy Stewart classic *It's a Wonderful Life*, and purchased during an early trip to Man-ny's in New York, at a time when he was basically penniless. "It cost \$2,500, or around \$5,000 Australian, which is, like, \$6,000 more than I had," he says. "But I feel like if a guitar is in your possession, you're the current caretaker and your job is simply to take care of it. The fact that they all drowned on my watch just was devastating to me." He drops his head. That a Nashville luth-

ier was able to painstakingly restore Clarence and most of his other guitars back to health doesn't matter. Six years on, and he still feels guilty.

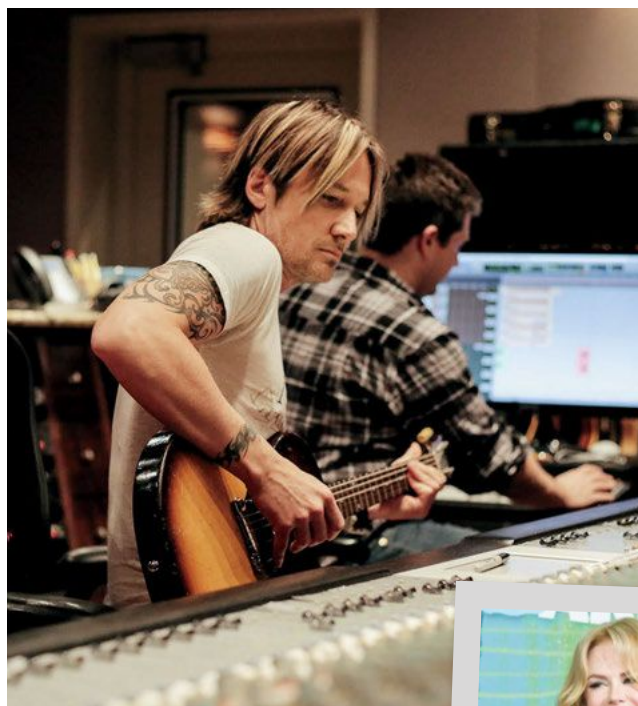
Which makes you wonder if he cried about it, and if he has cried recently.

He nods, his blue eyes turning melancholy. "This morning. Nic was filming some pretty harrowing, abusive scenes last night, and she was telling me about them." As it happens,

he's a big believer in the therapeutic value of crying. He goes on, "When I haven't cried in a while, I can tell I get pent-up. Then maybe once a month I have a good cry, one big avalanche of a torrential downpour, and I feel amazing for weeks afterward. The streets are cleaned, the skies are blue, there's no humidity and it's beautiful."

IN FACT, IT'S DISMAL OUTSIDE today, the wind blowing rain away in sheets throughout downtown Nashville. That's when Urban, once again in the arena's bowels, takes off his hoodie, scratches at his chin stubble and first starts to tell his story.

Technically, he's a Kiwi, but he was raised in Australia, where his parents, Marianne and Bob, loved country music, always had Glen Campbell, Dolly Parton and Ricky Skaggs on the stereo. They ran a convenience store in Brisbane, then moved to a farm an hour north when Keith was 10. "I had to clean out the pigsties and shovel shit out of the chicken coops," he says. "But even after our house burned down and we had to live in our tin tractor shed for 18 months, my older brother, Shane, and I sleeping in a



Life in Music City, USA

After eight solo albums and 25 years in Nashville, Urban is about as progressive as they come in the country-music capital, where he lives with his wife, Nicole Kidman (below), and their two daughters. But it took time for the Aussie to settle in. "I was very insecure," he says. "I was just an alien."



single bed on one side of a big workbench, my parents on the other, and it looked like a squatter's residence – all that, for me, is a great memory."

His first instrument, at the age of four, was a ukulele, but two years later, his folks gave him a cheapo guitar, and it quickly became clear he had a gift. Sometimes, at school, he'd get hassled for being overly blond and dimpled, but because he could play the guitar he pretty much skated by. Then, in eighth grade, he won the lead in a school production of *Oliver!* and got his first taste of fame, with all his classmates wearing promo buttons that featured his picture. "My first merch," he says, happily. "And when the musical started, I suddenly had a lot of girlfriends, which I thought was fantastic, but when the run ended, they all ran. I remember very vividly thinking, 'Right. I get it. This is all just fantasy bullshit, don't get caught up in that.'" At the age of 15, with his parents' blessing, he dropped out of school to tour and play full-time in every rough-stuff roadhouse and flea-bitten pub he could find.

Throughout, he was a good kid who never got in trouble. Didn't drink much, didn't smoke much dope, didn't have run-ins with the law, didn't fight. "Actually, I've never even physically punched anybody, ever. I'm just not a fighter." His tidy, bordering-on-idyllic childhood reached a high point in 1990, when he was 23 and won a major televised contest called *Star Maker*, which led to a recording contract with EMI and four hit singles on the Australian country charts. "Suddenly, I had bumper stickers with my name on them, T-shirts with my picture," he says. "I was selling merchandise. I toured

with a road crew." In other words, he was a big deal, about to only get bigger. So what did he do next? He moved to Nashville, where he spent the next seven years going nowhere but the crapper.

It was the early Nineties, the mild-mannered, so-called hat-act era, Alan Jackson and Garth Brooks leading the shuffle, and here comes this guitar-slinging long-haired weirdo with an even weirder accent. Nobody wanted anything to do with him. "Nothing I'd done before meant shit," he says. "I felt like I was meant to be here, I had this absolute burning belief, but I was out of step with everything. I mean, what do you do when you're doing your best and it's not enough? I had no plan for that." He lived in a rotten part of town, stowed a big metal garden scythe in his car – "a psychopath's fucking tool" – just in case, and had as a roommate a guy who loved to freebase cocaine. "And then one day he offered me this massive pipe," Urban says. "I'd never had it, it looked good, so I took it. Things didn't immediately go pear-shaped, but that was the beginning of it."

He was confused and lonely and not playing in any of Nashville's clubs, because you didn't perform threadbare covers in dive

bars if you wanted to make it as an original recording artist. It was the first time in a decade that the entertainer in him could not freely entertain, and it began to mess with his head. "When I was onstage, I felt good, but if I was not onstage, I was very, very insecure," he says. "I felt like I didn't have much of anything to offer. I was just an alien. And then I was on the phone with this girl I was dating. She's trying to break up with me. I'm saying, 'What the hell? What's going on? What's happened?' And eventually she said, 'For fuck's sake, can't you see that the novelty of you has worn off?' You might say, 'Big deal.' But I was feeling insecure, and the fact that me and my accent would be a novelty to somebody cut me to the core. Oh, my God. Really bad. It devastated me. It was a turning point. After that, shit started to really go awry. I stepped up my drinking. I started doing more drugs. Yeah, man.

The whole back end of the Nineties were just awful."

Drugs and more drugs, coke and Ecstasy in particular. "They were my thing. I loved them."

And with that said, it's time for him to get back to work.

IT'S DARK INSIDE THE ARENA, but the music is loud and thumping. The boys in Urban's band – guitarist Danny Rader, drummer Seth Rausch, bassist Jerry Flowers and new member Nathan Barlowe, on a kooky homemade sampling device he calls the Phantom – are blazing through the middle moments of the catchy hit tune "Somewhere in My Car," from 2013's *Fuse*. Urban isn't playing today, however. His back is hurting, so he's standing in front of the guys, stiff as a bird colonel, hands on hips, nodding and saying, "Yeah, yeah, OK, good. That's the way to do it. That's right." He's endlessly encouraging and positive with his remarks, which is entirely unlike how the early Nashville cats were with him back in the day.

In 1995, he cobbled together a trio called the Ranch, had the good fortune to land a deal with Capitol Nashville, and the misfortune to spend the next two years in record-making hell. "It was mind-blowing," he says. "We recorded some of those songs 12 times, the same song in different studios, different producers, always trying to get the right combination of radio-ready stuff." Saying this, he kind of snorts. "One night we'd finished a track and this famous producer, who I won't name, said, 'All right, boys, what do you want? Fiddle or steel?' I said, 'I don't want either.' He said, 'Look, kid, I don't make the fucking rules. You choose, fiddle or steel. I don't give a shit.' Those two years were full of moments like that." The album tanked and the band split up, which led Urban into yet another downward spi-

ral. In 1998, however, he fell in with a simpatico producer named Matt Rollings; together, they created his first solo album, released the next year, which got him his first hit songs.

"Capitol presented it as 'We're giving you one chance as a solo artist,'" says Rollings. "We turned some tracks in and they said, 'Let's do this.' His timing couldn't have been better. I don't know if he was the anti-Garth, but he certainly wasn't like Garth. His intuition is amazing. He saw his opening and went right through it."

Right now, Urban is on the phone with Kidman, then wandering off to eat a chicken sandwich. He says he talks to her "multiple times a day," which makes perfect sense. She's been his salvation. He'd entered rehab twice before, only to relapse, but when she staged an intervention in 2006, he left home for three months of in-patient hard work and returned dedicated to his sobriety. The only residue of those last few saturated days is guilt over what he put her through. "I caused the implosion of my fresh marriage," he says. "It survived, but it's a miracle it did. I was spiritually awoken with her. I use the expression 'I was born into her,' and that's how I feel. And for the first time in my life, I could shake off the shackles of addiction."

On the one hand, that his rejection by Nashville could lead to multiple addictions resonates in a certain apt way; on the other, it seems oddly incomplete, like he's skating around something, and the obvious place to look for it is back in his childhood, which he's always presented as anything but fraught. Just yesterday, he'd said his only traumas as a kid revolved around his parents moving a lot. But maybe today it'll be different.

If he could change anything about the way he was raised, what would it be?

He doesn't hesitate. "I'd like to have been raised in a much more intimate house."

What's that mean?

He tilts his head, scuffs his feet. "My dad was an alcoholic, and I grew up in an alcoholic's house. No intimacy."

Was he abusive?

"My recollection is that he was a physical disciplinarian. Ten years ago, I would have said, 'He never did anything I didn't deserve.' Now I realize it's not about deserving it." He leans forward, says, "I don't recall him ever telling me he loved me as a kid. I'd do a gig I thought was fantastic and the only thing he'd say is, 'When you speak onstage, you've got to slow down.' He never commented on anything else. And the way he disciplined me, he seemed to have forgotten about it as he got older. I don't think he was in denial, he genuinely had no recollection. 'Hitting you? I never did that!'" This comes as a bit of a shock, mainly because Urban has never publicly mentioned



Life on Tour

Urban performing on his Ripcord World Tour in Miami in June

it before, and it does explain a few things: his love of performing, and then, years later, in Nashville, how destructive it was for him when he stopped playing on a stage. And even why he plays country music at all. "[My dad] was into it, and I wanted his approval," Urban says. "I feel very sure if he'd been into African music, I'd be living in Zimbabwe, having the same talk about 'Wow, they must have thought you were strange when you got to this town.'"

He pauses, exhales. He's going back in time, to 1998, seven years since he released his four hit records in Australia, five years since that girl called him a novelty, another long year away from success. He was at a house out in Franklin, about 20 miles south of Nashville, staring at a big pile of coke, about to embark on another one of his binges, which is how he used to roll – a few days or weeks off, then blammo.

"I had plenty of stuff," he says. "I didn't seem able to stop. There was no stopping this time. I'd go to sleep, wake up a couple of hours later, go at it again, drinking to take the edge off. I remember thinking, 'I'm probably not going to make it until tomorrow.' And then I thought, 'Fuck it. I really don't care. It'll be a relief to not have to. I'll

take an Ambien and at some point I'll pass.' I was taking everything. I remember thinking, 'Oh, good, this is the end of it, yahoo.' I was quite happy about it." He leans back in his chair, smiles and shrugs. "Well, I woke up the next day at lunchtime, in my bed, sweating, going, 'Fuck! Guess I'm not going to get to go this way.' I thought the choice to quit would be taken from me, which would be easier than me trying to do it on my own. There was coke left, so I went at it again."

Standing up, he throws away some trash, moving his back around to see if it still hurts. For as heavy as these last few revelations have been, he seems oddly unmoved, maybe because the events are so long in the past. "You know, early on in my sobriety, there was a period when I wished I hadn't succumbed to drugs and everything the way I did," he says. "It sucked up so much creative time, when I should have been in the studio working. But I don't know what came from that time, other than that I'm where I am. Because of, or in spite of, nobody knows and never will." Then he returns to the main stage of the arena, leaving his scent to linger here and for anyone standing nearby to hope that it hangs around for a lot longer than most.

Reviews

"And it's a long way back from 17.
The whispers turn into a scream.
And I... I'm not coming home."
—BLINK-182, "Bored to Death"



Blink-182 Restart the Pop- Punk Party

Adding a new member, the band returns to (and builds on) its golden-age sound



Blink-182

California BMG

★★★★½

BY JON DOLAN

It's been almost 20 years since Blink-182 first blazed a pantsless trail across rock radio. But the pop-punk trio are still a generational touchstone: If you missed your junior prom because you passed out in the back of a rented limo while your date took off to hook up with the captain of the JV lacrosse team, Blink's mix of good-natured snottiness, teen-movie humor, fumbling vulnerability and Big Gulp tune-fulsness will forever move you in a way no art can. And even if you weren't on their wavelength, it's tough to argue against "All the Small Things" or "Rock Show" as grade-A bubble-thrash bangers — Green Day with the angst blunted just enough to make coming-of-age feel like a benign belly-flop rather than a suicide screed.

After two weirdly restrained albums (2003's *Blink-182* and 2011's *Neighborhoods*), the

Reviews

band is aiming to recapture its golden-age sound on *California*. But it won't be easy: Tom DeLonge, who gave the group its prankster-dweeb appeal, is no longer a member, leaving his husky-voiced, more introspective-sounding co-founder, Mark Hoppus, and new recruit Matt Skiba (of emo vets Alkaline Trio) to pick up the slack. "It's a long way back from 17," Hoppus admits, defining the album's nostalgic challenge on "Bored to Death," before pensive guitar churn and Travis Barker's swirling drum clatter explode into a high-fiving chorus.

Skiba wisely doesn't try to fill DeLonge's shoes, throwing in some earnest vocals and generally riding along as Hoppus' assist man. But if DeLonge's pencil-necked pique is missed, this is still the catchiest music they've made since 2001's *Take Off Your Pants and Jacket*, a feast of "summer, yo!" riffs and petulant "na-na-na" refrains. "She's Out of Her Mind" builds a cheery sing-along moment out of the term "anti-social," and on "No Future" and "Kings of the Weekend," hooks pile up like empty beer cans.

The band's old porn-adjacent side pops up on "Brohemian Rhapsody" – not a Queen cover but 30 seconds of precision-strike punishment and a single icky lyric: "There's something about you that I can't quite put my finger in." But there are endearing signs of growth and even wisdom. On "Sober," over Barker's brat-Bonham thwack and carpet-burn guitars, Hoppus sings vividly about how hard partying leads to hard choices, and the heartfelt title track is a sweet evocation of their home state, not as endless party palace but as a place to grow up, staying indoors in perfect weather and passing celebrities on the beach.

At its best, *California* shows Blink trying new ways to freshen up yesterday's racket.



Flea and Kiedis
in Napa,
California

The Cali-Funk Kings Refine Their Grind

Danger Mouse and Radiohead's producer help on an adventurous Chili Peppers LP

Red Hot Chili Peppers *The Getaway*

Warner Bros. ★★½



Like being an NFL linebacker, being a Red Hot Chili Pepper is a challenging gig to age gracefully in; literally or metaphorically, tube socks on your johnson ain't a good look at 50. To their credit, the Peppers' 11th LP is a bold attempt to jibe their past party-dog selves with their present-day artistic ambitions – not always a perfect fit but a compelling one.

With production by Danger Mouse, and Radiohead sixth man Nigel Godrich on the mix, the sound is top-shelf modern-rock splendor: shimmering guitar fractals, flashing string arrangements, artisanal rhythmic flourishes. Yet Flea's bass still grounds the music, as sinewy as Iggy Pop's musculature, with Anthony Kiedis dirty-romanticizing L.A. as he macks his way through. There are surprising moves (the Chic-cum-Daft Punk mash-up "Go Robot," the grinding blues rock and shout-out to late producer J Dilla in "Detroit") and also familiar flourishes (the plodding rap rock of "We Turn Red"). Lyrically, the vibe is often wistful. On the ambient nostalgia trip "Encore," Kiedis invokes the Beatles, while the sultry psych-funk jam "Dreams of a Samurai" finds him naked in the kitchen of a woman "too young to be my wife" and subsequently "taking acid in the graveyard." As visions of mortality go, sounds promising.

WILL HERMES



Mitski

Puberty 2 Dead Oceans ★★½

Arty Brooklyn songwriter bares her scars, and does it brilliantly

"My body is made of crushed little stars," 25-year-old Asian-American indie rocker Mitski Miyawaki tells us – a perfect greeting from an artist who specializes in incendiary malaise. Her fourth LP veers from the art pop of "Happy," with braying sax and a rhythm track built from CD skips, to the Pixies-loving "A Loving Feeling" to the glitchy, ghostly "Crack Baby." The centerpiece is the binational anthem "Your Best American Girl," where she sings about the cultural challenges of dating an all-American boy. "Your mother wouldn't approve of how my mother raised me," she moans over slow-guitar fuzz. "But I do." Her mom should be proud. **SUZU EXPOSITO**



Kaleo

A/B Elektra

★★★

Icelandic rockers dig into American blues and folk

Kaleo hail from Mosfellsbær, Iceland, but you wouldn't know it by frontman JJ Julius Son's finetuned biker-soul growl or the overheated garage blues on the band's major-label debut. "No Good," which appears on the soundtrack to HBO's *Vinyl*, stomps like the Black Keys at their meatiest, and "Broken Bones" is an able idealization of devil-befriending Delta blues. There's a little more ice and snow on "Vor I Vagaskogi," where Son sings in his native language and sounds like Chris Cornell on a sad Viking quest, and he really lets his folk flag fly on "All the Pretty Girls," a tender bit of Bon Iver-style falsetto bliss. **JON DOLAN**

On the Shelf



Gentlemen Only Parisian Break by Givenchy

Givenchy weaves the essence of Parisian summers into their new fragrance for men. Gentlemen Only Parisian Break is an ode to the City of Light, reflecting its elegance, strength and sense of freedom. Petitgrain lemon blends with Nepalese mint to create a top of citrusy freshness which gradually transforms to a heart of sage. A woody addiction begins to form at this point, smoothly blending into vetiver's noble elegance and a sensual amber effect.



Alliance Small by Victorinox

Victorinox Swiss Army's latest collection of watches for women aims to combine the secrets of time and space. Consecutive round circles, symbolizing planetary motion, structure the Alliance Small. Each watch's center is a mother of pearl circle that gleams like a full moon. The round 35mm polished case contains a lacquered circular zone directly underneath the applied indices, while in orbit around six o'clock are a diamond, reminding of stardust, and a date aperture. Carrying the theme of the full moon is an engraved crescent shape on the case back. The Alliance Small range also incorporates moonphase functionality and comes with the choice of a monochrome or bi-color metal bracelet, or a leather strap available in various shades.



HC-PV100 by Panasonic

Panasonic's latest offering HC-PV100 is a one model solution for events ranging from weddings to parties and even business conferences. The full-HD camcorder is equipped with 3 manual rings, the HC-PV100 also features XLR mic/line inputs and a 20x zoom lens. Its bright LED video light supports shoots in dim lighting and at night. The camera also features a dual SD card slot so you can record through long events like weddings, music video shoots, concerts and more. Price on request.

Legend Spirit by Montblanc

Montblanc's new fragrance for men Legend spirit is success and sophistication in a bottle. With sparkling top notes of pink peppercorn, bitter grapefruit and transparent zesty bergamot it unveils a powerful heart of intense lavender, hypnotic cardamom and aquatic accord. White woods - sandalwood, cedar and cashmere - sensually blend with oak moss, creating the base notes, softened with a cocktail of white musks. Montblanc Legend bottle's original curvaceous shape are preserved, but Montblanc Legend Spirit stands out thanks to its modern aesthetic of immaculate glossy white lacquer and tempered steel. The three metallic rings, a symbol found on Montblanc pens, are also featured at the base of the packaging.





Eluga Note by Panasonic

Electronic giant Panasonic has unveiled the latest addition to its smartphone line: the Eluga Note. The phone comes with a 13.97 cm (5.5) Full HD IPS display with minimal power consumption. The Eluga also sports a 16 MP rear camera and front 5MP camera which features gesture-based selfie features including voice capture, smile shot & gesture-based shot. Weighing a mere 142 gms, the Eluga Note has a battery capacity of 3000mAh and a 32 GB internal memory, expandable up to 32 GB. The phone operates on Android 6.0 (Marshmallow) with the Panasonic FitHome user interface and has a textured, champagne gold finish. The Eluga Note is priced at INR 13, 290.



GA-100 by Casio G-Shock

Made in collaboration with fashion designer Marcelo Burlon, the new G-Shock GA-100 from Casio is all about style, functionality and adventure. The limited edition watch features the Burlon brand's signature coral snake pattern design. The base color is bold black monotone with a black ion plated finish on the buckle, back and metal band ring. Its 3D printed 'scales' form a seamless look, and provide outstandingly exotic graphic texture. The watch also features ultra-shock resistance, a full auto LED display, an automatic calendar and much more.



Easy Wash Shirt with Zero Detergent Technology by Van Heusen

Van Heusen's latest offering seeks to eliminate the stress of laundry day while also looking out for the environment. Their new collection of Easy Wash Shirts has been made with a Zero Detergent technology that cuts the need for detergent while washing up. The fabric requires 'just a dab of water' to remove everyday stains and keeps you feeling fresh no matter what you have lined up during the day. Available at Van Heusen showrooms across India, the shirts are priced at INR 2,899 onwards.

Illicit by Jimmy Choo

Jimmy Choo combines elegance and edge with their striking new fragrance Illicit. Created for a woman who is the heart and soul of every party, Illicit combines ginger with bitter orange, warming into a floral heart of jasmine and rose. The fragrance gradually dries down to reveal the perfume's pièce de résistance – a gourmand honey-amber accord. Contained in an art deco-style crystal glass tumbler with raised rivets around the base, the bottle makes for an arresting display piece to adorn dressing tables. Jimmy Choo's Illicit is available in various sizes, including 40ml, 60 ml and 100ml.



CH Men Privé by Carolina Herrera

Exuding masculinity, elegance and sophistication, CH Privé was created as a scent for the urban gentleman. Inspired by the rich scents of leather and whiskey, perfumer Christoph Raynard chose a variety of raw materials to recreate them: an exquisite whiskey accord blended with a touch of grapefruit delivers a top of freshness, provocative and modern. To reinforce the elegant and intensity of the fragrance, the heart offers a mix of spices and aromatic notes boosted by frozen lavender. The exclusive quality of leather has the place of honor; through this mysterious ingredient the fragrance reveals all its intensity, texture and refinement.



GIG CALENDAR

2STROKE TOUR

The multi-city tour series is getting more intense in its fourth edition — Mumbai alt metal band Goddess Gagged, who went on a hiatus in January 2014, will reunite for their first set of shows alongside local bands in seven cities between August 26th and September 4th. Unlike previous editions which hosted two bands, only Goddess Gagged will tour this time, with support from the likes of Kolkata metal act What Escapes Me, Guwahati alt metal band Lucid Recess, Delhi math rockers Kraken, Mumbai space rock band Gumbal and more.

August 26th

PRINCETON CLUB,
Kolkata w/What Escapes Me

August 27th

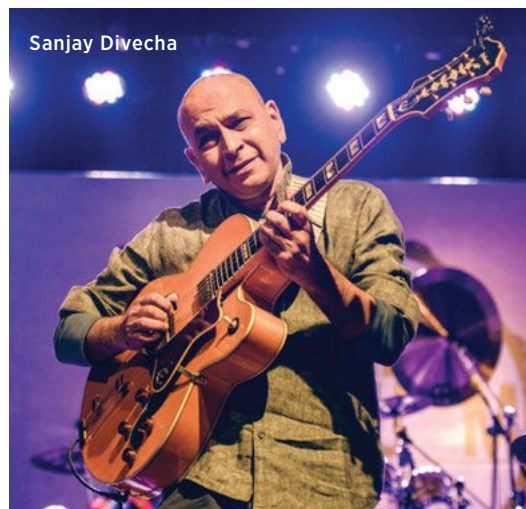
CLOUD 9,
Shillong w/Dossers Urge

August 28th

TERRA MAYAA,
Guwahati w/Lucid Recess, Dark Carnage

August 31st,

ANTISOCIAL,
New Delhi w/Kraken



Sanjay Divecha

SANJAY DIVECHA

Ace guitarist Sanjay Divecha will launch his fusion-driven album 'Sanjay Divecha and Secret' this month. Divecha's sophomore record draws from jazz, African, Indian classical, folk and blues. It also features an all-star list of collaborators such as pianist/keyboardist Louie Banks, drummers Gino Banks and Kurt Peters,

djembe player Anand Bhagat, vocalist Naresh Kamath, saxophonists Shirish Malhotra, Ryan Sadri and Rhys Sebastian, and trumpeter Kishore Sodha.

August 4th

BLUE FROG,
Mumbai
PARADIGM SHIFT & ANAND BHASKAR

COLLECTIVE

Six-member alt/prog/fusion rock band Paradigm Shift will premiere the video for their metal-leaning, new single "Banjaara," off their upcoming album. Fusion rock act Anand Bhaskar Collective, who are also prepping for their next record, will celebrate their two-year anniversary at this double-bill gig.

August 11th

BUE FROG,
Mumbai

BROKEN ROADS TOUR FEAT. LAST REMAINING LIGHT, D'S KITCHEN

Almost a year after hitting the road, Mumbai alt-rock band Last Remaining Light return to play four cities this month alongside Bengaluru rock act D's Kitchen as part of the debut edition of the Broken Roads tour. The two bands will perform in Mumbai, Pune, Bengaluru

and Chennai.

August 4th,

HARD ROCK CAFÉ
Andheri, Mumbai

August 5th,

THE HUMMING TREE,
Bengaluru

August 6th,

THE MOON AND SIXPENCE,
Chennai

August 7th,

THE HIGH SPIRITS,
Pune

JENNY AND THE SCALLYWAGS

The Bangkok-based folk/pop band Jenny And The Scallywags will make their India debut this month in Mumbai and Pune. The band

comprises vocalist-guitarist Jennifer Lackgren, guitarist Charlie McSkallywag, backing vocalists and ukulele players Adam Sharpe and Will Corbin, bassist Paul Romaine and drummer Ludovic Leflon. Jenny and the Scallywags, who draw influence from pop artists like Paolo Nutini and Vance Joy, released their self-titled debut EP earlier this year.

August 19th,

HIGH SPIRITS,
Pune

August 21st,

ANTISOCIAL KHAR,
Mumbai



Anand Bhaskar Collective

THE PLAYLIST

OUR FAVORITE SONGS, ALBUMS AND VIDEOS RIGHT NOW

GUEST
LIST



Rob Zombie

Five Songs I Wish I'd Written

The former White Zombie frontman, who is spending his summer on the road with Korn, broke down his favorite monster songs.

Roky Erickson "Creature With the Atom Brain"

It's a very big-sounding rock song because he's got a really big voice.

The song itself isn't particularly creepy – it's the lyrics and delivery.

The Cramps "I Was a Teenage Werewolf"

Their whole thing is horror-rock monster songs. This is pretty low-fi and trashy. It has a really 1960s garage-rock sound.

The Castle Kings "You Can Get Him, Frankenstein"

A doo-wop-y song from when I was a kid, like "Monster Mash." If you went to a Halloween party, you heard this.

Tom Waits "King Kong"

It's a great song. He's just telling the story of the love story of King Kong, screaming in his super-raspy, heavy voice.

Misfits "Vampira"

I had to pick the Misfits. I've done that song with Danzig many times. It's barely a minute and a half – one buzz-saw riff, basically, like all their songs.

1. NAF "Door"

A low-flying post-punk torpedo from Jenny Lewis and her new awesomely named band, Nice as Fuck. The droning bass and stark, spacey production imply moody drama, but Lewis' voice is warm and friendly: "Don't close the door/We are so close," she sings. It's like Joy Division or Public Image Ltd bathed in California light.

2. Neil Young "Love and Only Love"

Young's new ecology-themed live album, *Earth*, closes with "Love and Only Love," from 1990's *Ragged Glory*, stretching out for nearly half an hour of cloud-burst distortion and raging hope.

3. Disclosure and Al Green "Feel Like I Do"

U.K. house-music whiz kids flip a bit of Green's 1972 hit "I'm Still in Love With You" for a glistening late-night dance-floor come-on.

4. Esme Patterson "No River"

A subtle Sixties soul throwback from rootsy pop artist Patterson, who sings, "I can't keep running, I'm no river," fighting against life's weird flow with elegant determination.



5. Drive-By Truckers "Surrender Under Protest"

Truckers main man Patterson Hood recently moved from his native South to Portland, Oregon. But the DBTs still can't escape the burden of history. This barreling rocker, written by co-leader Mike Cooley, takes on Dixie holdouts over scorched-earth guitars.

6. Van Morrison "Bein' Green"

A previously unreleased gem from a new reissue of Morrison's classic 1974 live LP, *It's Too Late to Stop Now*. He turns Kermit the Frog's greatest hit into a blues scorcher.

7. Danny Brown "When It Rains"

The shape-shifting Detroit rapper's first song in some time is worth the wait. Over a five-alarm EDM-heavy beat, Brown hollers, "When it rains, when it pours, get your ass on the floor," making desperation feel like a party.



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